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Critical Incident Report No. 7

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT 4-5 AUGUST 1964

26 February 1965

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COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT
4-5 AUGUST 1964

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COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT
4-5 AUGUST 1964

PREFACE

1. This paper presents an account of command and control aspects of the Tonkin Gulf incident of 4 and 5 August 1964. The paper is one of a series prepared in response to DJSM 1111-61 of 14 September 1961 and other JCS authorizations, in accordance with which WSEG has been conducting studies of command problems and procedures in a variety of recent critical situations. The overall purpose of these studies is to provide empirical data concerning the operations of the national military command system in actual crisis situations, in order to aid in the development of improved command and control arrangements and procedures.

2. The basic paper covers command decisions and actions during the incident; NMCC operations in connection with it and the communications support and information flow that were involved in its management. Summary observations on what are believed to be the chief command and control aspects of the incident are presented at the end of the basic paper, on pages 65-71.

3. The basic paper is followed by a series of supporting appendices which cover some of the material in greater detail, and which provide documentation of the points made in the basic paper. These appendices cover some of the important policy and planning actions which preceded the incident; the 2 and 4 August attacks on the U.S. destroyers, which precipitated it; message and telephone traffic relating to it; and an outline chronology of the main events.

4. The overall study is based upon an analysis of messages, logs, recorded telephone traffic,[1] and other documentary materials that were made available in the NMCC and J-3, and also to some extent in J-6, the Services, DIA, and ISA. In addition, about a dozen staff officers associated with the event were interviewed. The information available suffers from certain limitations, in that it does not reveal some of the details of the high-echelon activity connected with the incident, and some of the more highly classified aspects of it. However, it is believed that enough information has been gathered to permit a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the crisis from the command and control standpoint.

5. In order to make the paper as accurate and useful as possible, an earlier draft was informally submitted to J-3 for comments, criticisms, and suggestions. The present version incorporates numerous corrections and revisions that have been made in the light of the comments received; however, the responsibility for any remaining weaknesses or inaccuracies in the paper rests with the authors.

INTRODUCTION

6. The Tonkin Gulf incident of 4-5 August 1964 was a short but hectic affair, distinguished by the fact that, on very short notice, U.S. forces were directed to conduct a series of offensive air strikes against North Vietnam. The strikes were intended as a limited, essentially punitive retaliation against North Vietnam for having attacked U.S. naval vessels patrolling in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. In order to have the punishment fit the crime,

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[1] Nonsecure telephone only. It should be noted that the majority of telephone conversations described in this paper were conducted over nonsecure voice circuits. The few conversations mentioned which were conducted over secure voice circuits are specifically identified.

yet not seem completely disproportionate to it, the strikes were mounted by U.S. carrier-based aircraft against North Vietnamese PT/PGM boats[1] in selected base and operating areas, and against associated POL storage facilities. The PT/PGM base facilities themselves were not attacked; the target areas and weapons were chosen with a view to inflicting material damage with a minimum of population casualties; and, although some aircraft were recycled for a second strike against one of the targets, the entire operation was intended to be a "one-shot" deal.

7. As a deterrent to inimical enemy reactions following the U.S. strikes, and in order to be in position to deal effectively with such reactions if they occurred, the U.S. simultaneously embarked on a substantial redeployment of forces to strengthen the U.S. military posture in Southeast Asia. Altogether, therefore, the incident generated a great deal of military activity, over and above the strikes themselves.

8. The incident stands out as one of the rare occasions since the Korean War in which U.S. forces have overtly engaged in military hostilities for purposes other than local self defense. It was, moreover, an all U.S. operation, with essentially no collaboration and little coordination with other nations, and with command and control in U.S. hands. Within the U.S. Government, it was treated largely as a straightforward military operation, not requiring the great volume of interagency consultation and coordination that has been associated with politico-military crises of the recent past. The Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was heavily involved in the management of the operation, with the Operations Directorate functioning in a central role. ✓

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[1] Torpedo boats and motor gunboats.

9. It was probably the first significant military action of the postwar period in which a concept of measured retaliation against the perpetrator of a hostile act was given a real world test. In the immediate aftermath it appeared to be a clear success; the damage inflicted was generally regarded as sufficiently heavy, in relation to the provocation, and if one excludes the ambiguous Tonkin Gulf incident of 18 September, some seven weeks later, there was no repetition of the attacks on U.S. vessels. Nor, in the immediate aftermath, was there any other action by Communist powers in the area that indicated a willingness to engage U.S. forces outside the context of the presently circumscribed guerrilla war in South Vietnam.

10. In the larger perspective, the implications of the episode may be much broader. Although still within the confines of a restrained application of force to attain limited objectives, it demonstrated that the U.S. was willing to take strong retaliatory action in defense of its rights and interests (even though in the first instance the U.S. sustained no actual losses), accepting the risk of escalation. As something of a precedent for this kind of action, it is not unlikely that it has affected the image of the U.S. held by friend and foe alike, and that it has strengthened the credibility of the U.S. word. It could, therefore, have a profound impact on U.S. foreign relations, and in particular on the nature of the provocations which Communist countries of the world are willing to risk, even in areas far removed from Southeast Asia.

11. It may be worth adding that the manner in which the U.S. reacts to such provocations in the future may reinforce

the Tonkin Gulf precedent by repeating it, if that is considered desirable. On the other hand, if U.S. words and deeds convey the impression that actions of the sort undertaken are contrary to the rules of international behavior that the U.S. wishes to see in effect, the precedent may be downgraded. In this regard, it is significant that on 18 September, when it was believed that U.S. vessels had again been attacked, the Tonkin Gulf pattern of retaliation emerged as the appropriate response to make if it could be determined that an attack had occurred.

COMMAND DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

12. From the command and control standpoint, the speed with which basic decisions were made was one of the remarkable aspects ~~of the incident~~. Only six hours elapsed between the time word reached Washington of a possible attack on the DESOTO Patrol (the U.S. destroyer patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin), and the time CINCPAC was given the order to execute retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam. The decision to retaliate was made even faster than this, and was apparently made without any great difficulty.

13. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, the area was one in which the U.S. had for some time been alert to the possibility of some form of escalatory enemy action, growing out of the guerrilla warfare in Laos and South Vietnam. In connection with the continuing hostilities in both countries, much consideration had already been given to various forms and degrees of action against North Vietnam, by South Vietnamese and/or U.S. forces.[1] CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, a plan calling for a wide range and variety of actions against Communist areas in Laos and North Vietnam, to be carried out primarily by South

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[1] For further details see Appendix A, "Policy and Planning Background of the Tonkin Gulf Incidents of 2 and 4 August 1964."

Vietnamese forces with U.S. forces participating only on a non-attributable basis, had been developed and approved some time before (in April 1964). In addition, as an outgrowth of OPLAN 37-64 and other plans involving action in Southeast Asia, a detailed study of the North Vietnamese target system had been prepared by a group of officers from the Joint Staff and the CINCPAC staff, with assistance from the Services. The study provided information not only on the characteristics of a large number of various types of targets but also on the damage effects that could be achieved, with probability values attached, by various kinds and scales of attack against them. Important command authorities, such as the SecDef and the JCS, were well aware of the target study; and both the study and some of the officers who had participated in its preparation were available to these command authorities during the decision-making period, when options were being considered. This undoubtedly facilitated the decision-making process and shortened the time required to make basic decisions.

14. In the second place, the 4 August attack was the second attack in several days on the DESOTO Patrol. On 2 August the Patrol, then being conducted by the USS MADDOX, was attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats, which fired both torpedoes and 37mm guns at it. The MADDOX successfully evaded the torpedoes and, with the assistance of several carrier-based aircraft from the USS TICONDEROGA, drove off the attackers. No damage or casualties were sustained by the MADDOX or aircraft.[1]

15. During the 2 August engagement, the enemy PT boats were damaged, but, in accordance with prevailing "self-defense" rules of engagement which precluded hot pursuit, they were not

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[1] For further details see Appendix C, "The First and Second Attacks on the DESOTO Patrol: 2 and 4 August 1964."

destroyed. The first official Washington reaction appeared to be satisfied with this outcome. The SecState told the press, "The other side got a sting out of this; if they do it again they'll get another sting," implying that a repetition of the attack would be met by a similar response.

[redacted]

16. The next day, however, a stronger U.S. reaction was revealed. It was announced that, by Presidential direction, (a) the DESOTO Patrol would continue in the Gulf of Tonkin, in reassertion of U.S. rights on the high seas; (b) an additional destroyer, the USS TURNER JOY, would be added to the Patrol; (c) a combat air patrol would be provided to the Patrol; and (d) both aircraft and destroyers would attack any force which attacked them, not only with the objective of driving off the force but of destroying it. A strong protest was also prepared for delivery to the government of North Vietnam.

17. The fact that the 2 August attack had occurred, that the President deemed a successful self defense an inadequate response, and that he had committed the U.S. to a stern position, probably set the stage for the reaction to the second attack on 4 August, which immediately turned to the consideration of strong action of a retaliatory nature.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

18. [The decision-making started at about 0920 Eastern Daylight (Q) Time on 4 August[1] when word was received that an attack on the DESOTO Patrol might be imminent.[2] The CJCS, who was one of the first to receive the information, checked with the Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) in the NMCC, who had]

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[1] All times throughout this paper are given in Eastern Daylight Time, unless otherwise specified.

[2] For some of the details omitted here, and information sources, see Appendix E, "Outline Chronology of Washington Actions."

[redacted]

also just received it. [redacted], who was scheduled to depart to attend a luncheon in New York and was therefore in something of a hurry, [redacted], where he talked to both the [redacted]. [redacted]. However, the CJCS was able to give the PACOM J-3 initial command guidance based on the previous day's discussions with the President, the SecDef, and the JCS. He directed the PACOM J-3 to make sure that the Task Force commander in the area was alerted to the threat and that he take "positive aggressive measures" to seek and destroy attacking forces if the attack developed.

This is not a redaction, rather we suspect it is the result of a highlighter.

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19. The CJCS then contacted a number of people, did some additional checking of the information, and went to the SecDef's office. By 1000 hours an *ad hoc* action group had assembled there, including the SecDef, the DepSecDef, the DJS, the DJ3, and several J-3 action officers (the CJCS had by this time departed for New York, apparently because a sudden cancellation of his scheduled luncheon might cause public speculation). Among the J-3 officers were officers who had worked on the North Vietnam target study, which they had brought to the SecDef's office with them. This group began to consider possibilities of retaliatory action against North Vietnam, even before the first report was received that the DESOTO Patrol was actually under torpedo attack, which came in at about 1100 hours.

20. Between 1000 and 1100, using the North Vietnam target study as a basic reference, the action group in the SecDef's

office proceeded to develop a number of retaliatory options: first, action against the bases and boats themselves, and second, action against POL storage tanks associated with the bases. Four of the five PT/PGM bases were tentatively selected as targets; the fifth, near the city of Haiphong, was ruled out because of the risk of inflicting too many civilian casualties.

[redacted]

21. Aerial mining of the PT/PGM bases was considered as one possibility, because of its relative cheapness and small risk of inflicting civilian casualties. At about 1045 hours one of the action officers in the group was directed to get a message out to CINCPAC ordering him to airlift 100 Mk 50 mines to the TICONDEROGA as soon as possible. The officer went to the NMCC, where he consulted the Team Chief and the DDO on sending the message. The DDO wrote the message in the action officer's presence, checked it with him to be sure it expressed the correct instructions, and sent it out by EMATS[1] at 1107. The message stated that the purpose of airlifting the mines to the TICONDEROGA was the possibility of mining the 5 PT/PGM bases in North Vietnam. It also stated that the mines were assumed to be at Subic Bay in the Philippines; none of the participants handling the message in the NMCC knew for certain.

22. Members of the action group in the SecDef's office knew the mines were at Subic Bay, however, and they also knew it would require some time to position them aboard the CVA. The reason for ordering them moved to the CVA at this early stage was to have an option in reserve in the event there was a delay in obtaining a Presidential decision (no one could predict how long that might take), in which case a ready mining capability might figure as one of the important retaliation alternatives.

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[1] Emergency Message Automatic Transmission System, operating in Mode 3 (manual).

[23. At about 1100 hours CINCPAC called for the DJS and was put through to him in the SecDef's office. The DJS informed him that retaliatory action against the bases and supporting POL facilities was under consideration. They discussed some of the targets, and CINCPAC suggested one, the Loc Chau estuary near Thanh Hoa, where boats frequently operated (see Figure 1). The DJS also told CINCPAC about the message being sent on airlifting the mines. CINCPAC objected to the mining option on grounds that it would take 48 hours to implement, even if the mines were airlifted; he said that air strikes against the bases would be more effective and could be done more easily, especially since a second CVA, the USS CONSTELLATION, was close enough to the scene to reinforce the TICONDEROGA. (The CONSTELLATION had left Hong Kong on 3 August, after the first attack, to join the TICONDEROGA.) CINCPAC also suggested, as one of the options, armed reconnaissance up and down the North Vietnamese coast hitting any PT/PGM vessels discovered in bays or at sea. The DJS felt that this would be a good option, and said he would suggest it. CINCPAC reiterated that he could do any of these things; he had two CVAs ready to go; all he needed was a go-ahead from Washington.

[redacted]

24. It was at the end of this conversation that CINCPAC told the DJS of a message he had just received, but which the DJS had not yet seen, saying that the DESOTO Patrol was under continuous torpedo attack, and had been for about half an hour. (A few minutes later, the PACOM Duty Officer called in the same information to the NMCC, which immediately passed it on in a conference call to the White House, State, CIA, and the Service war/situation rooms.)]

[redacted] LIBRARY

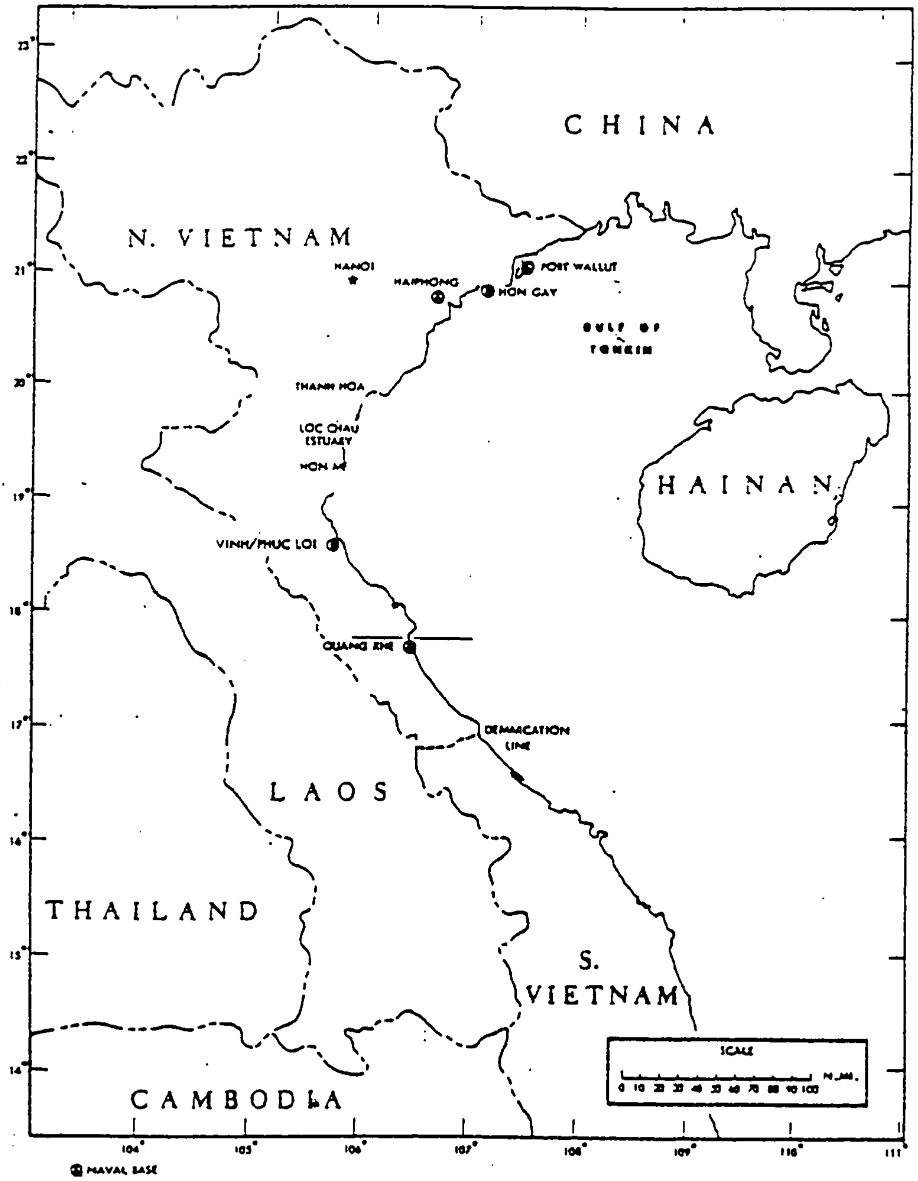

FIGURE 1. PT/PGM Targets in North Vietnam

25. The SecDef then called a meeting of the JCS in his own conference room. The SecState and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs were invited to join the meeting. Others present included the SecDef, the DepSecDef, the CSAF, the CSA, the CNO, the CMC, the DJS, the DJ3, and several J-3 action officers. The presence of the SecState and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs at this SecDef-JCS meeting in the Pentagon (as against similar meetings often held at the White House or at State) appears to have been without precedent. Their presence at this early stage in the high-level Pentagon deliberations undoubtedly short-cut many of the processes of inter-agency consultation and coordination that normally occur before an important politico-military question is brought to the President for decision; and their coming to the Pentagon probably reflected the predominantly military nature of the action under consideration.

[redacted]

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26. The discussion at this meeting revolved around the question of retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese PT/PGM bases and their associated POL depots, as contemplated by the earlier SecDef-Joint Staff action group. By about 1145 it was agreed that the SecDef and SecState would proceed to the White House (where they were scheduled to go anyway, to attend a regular 1230 NSC meeting), inform the President about this general line of thinking, and give him an indication of more detailed recommendations to follow. Meanwhile, the SecDef asked the JCS (CSAF, acting Chairman) to furnish him with detailed recommendations as soon as possible.

27. The SecDef then left with the SecState to go to the White House. There, the SecDef met with the President, then at 1230

attended the previously scheduled NSC meeting, and then at about 1300, after the NSC meeting was adjourned, lunched with the President, the SecState, the Director of CIA, and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

S 28. If the SecDef had not already informally obtained Presidential approval of at least the general outline of the action being contemplated in the Pentagon, he probably obtained it during the course of these White House meetings.

[redacted]

29. The JCS continued in session after the SecDef left for the White House. The discussion narrowed down to three courses of action: (a) low-level retaliation against one PT base at Phuc Loi, and against the POL depot associated with it at Vinh; (b) more severe retaliation against PT/PGM bases at Phuc Loi and Quang Khe, the Loc Chau estuary, and the POL tanks in the Phuc Loi/Vinh area, and (c) still more severe retaliation against all five PT/PGM bases and operating areas, the Phuc Loi/Vinh POL tanks, plus the naval base at Haiphong.

30. The JCS unanimously agreed to recommend the middle course of action, in (b) above. They also agreed to recommend that the retaliation be executed at next daylight (0700) Tonkin time. The DJS phoned their decision to the SecDef at 1325, when the latter was still at the White House.

31. The JCS reconvened at 1500, this time with the Ops Deps, the DJS, the DJ3, and several J-3 action officers, in the Gold Room. They were joined shortly after the meeting started by the SecDef, back from the White House, and by the DepSecDef. During the meeting the SecDef conveyed the President's approval of the option (b) target list, with several modifications. The base areas at Port Wallut and Hon Gay were added as targets;

and, except for the strikes against the POL tanks, the air strikes were to be carried out only against boats in the designated areas, not against the actual bases or port facilities. This shift in targets from base facilities to boats in the base areas represented the most significant change that had occurred as a result of the SecDef's discussion with the President.

32. By 1525, when the SecDef and the DepSecDef left the JCS meeting, the decision was set. A one-time maximum effort air strike would be carried out against North Vietnam, using CVA aircraft only, by 0700 local time (approximately first light) in the Gulf of Tonkin. This was expected to be at 1900 hours Washington time on that very day, 4 August, in just 3½ hours. (This lead time had by this time been cut by two hours from the time the JCS had initially recommended the 0700 local strike time, at 1325.) The strikes would be made against PGM/PT boats at Port Wallut, Hon Gay, Quang Khe, and the Loc Chau estuary; and against boats and POL facilities in the Vinh/Phuc Loi area. Armed reconnaissance against boats outside the three-mile limit would be authorized. [redacted] Secret

33. Up to this time, none of the decision-makers had called for a briefing on the weather situation in the Tonkin Gulf.

34. While the execution message was being prepared, the DJ3 called CINCPAC on the KY-9 at 1530 to alert him to the fact that the message was coming and to inform him of its substance. After approval by the JCS and the SecDef, at 1649 hours, the message was sent to CINCPAC by EMATS teletype, followed up by regular cable 30 minutes later. Indicated execute time was now less than two hours away.

35. The message, JCS 7720 (DTG 042119Z), stated that if weather precluded meeting the indicated time of attack CINCPAC was to proceed at the earliest and notify the JCS as soon as possible. If the targets were not destroyed on the first strike, he was to request authority for a second strike. The JCS were to be advised of the details of the strike plan when available, including the number of sorties against each target complex, weapon loading, tactics, and the like. FLASH reports were desired on mission results, and photo coverage was desired as soon as possible.

36. At 1640, in a conversation with CINCPAC, the DJS asked if the CVAs could launch their strikes by 0700 (Tonkin time). CINCPAC replied that he believed so, but that it would be tight. [redacted]

37. Meanwhile, uncertainty developed in the field about whether there had actually been an attack on the DESOTO vessels. After the initial report that the Patrol was under continuous torpedo attack, which was received in Washington shortly after 1100, and for the next several hours, both vessels sent in periodic SITREPs by FLASH precedence, indicating that they had evaded numerous torpedoes and had fired at a number of contacts, destroying two or three attacking vessels.[1] It was night in the area, however, and weather was poor, inhibiting visual observation (even by TICONDEROGA aircraft dropping flares), and interfering with radar and sonar operations. CINCPAC reported that neither the DESOTO vessels nor the aircraft were able to sight a definite ship or a wake. Neither vessels nor aircraft had been damaged.

38. Reevaluation of some of the early reports in the field indicated that many of the reports of contacts and torpedoes

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[1] For additional details, see Appendix C, "The First and Second Attacks on the DESOTO Patrol: 2 and 4 August 1964."

were doubtful. CINCPAC informed the DJS at about 1300, about 2½ hours after the action had begun, that freak weather effects on the radar and over-eager or over-excited sonarmen might have accounted for many of the reports, exaggerating the number of enemy vessels and torpedoes. He still believed there had been an attack, however. At 1600, i.e., after the execute decision had been made, CINCPAC explained this to the SecDef, who had called to find out the latest information on the situation. CINCPAC told him that the commander of the Patrol felt the situation was in doubt as to what had occurred, and that a daylight reconnaissance of the area was needed to verify the facts.

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[redacted]

39. CINCPAC and the SecDef then discussed the possibility that there had been no attack. The SecDef brought up problems of timing: he did not wish to release news of what had happened without saying what the U.S. was going to do about it; he did not want to say what the U.S. was going to do until the U.S. did it; he did not believe the U.S. should do it until absolutely sure of what had happened. He asked CINCPAC how these elements could be reconciled. CINCPAC recommended holding off on the execution order until he obtained a definite report, which he believed he could have in a couple of hours, by about 1800 hours, or about an hour before scheduled execute time. The SecDef directed that the execute order continue in effect, that aircraft and crews be prepared to carry it out, but that between then and 1800 CINCPAC obtain a definite report and call it in to the SecDef.

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40. At 1725 CINCPAC called the DJS, who was in the Gold Room, where the JCS and the Ops Deps were still in session. The SecDef was there as well, having rejoined the meeting. CINCPAC

[said he was still waiting for a report from the TURNER JOY, but he had some additional information that satisfied him that there had been an attack. This was apparently a North Vietnamese reference to the fact that they had "sacrificed" two ships. The DJS told him that the SecDef was there, and that the SecDef was also satisfied now. Finally, in another call to the DJS at 1810, CINCPAC obtained reconfirmation that the SecDef was satisfied and that he could proceed to execute the strikes.

41. While this uncertainty over whether the DESOTO Patrol had been attacked was being resolved, some uncertainty arose about when the strikes were to be executed. As noted above, the JCS execution message had directed that the strikes be carried out by 0700 local time. Although the message did not specify it, this was assumed to be 0700 H (Hotel) time, which would have been 1900 Washington time. CINCPAC, in a prepare-to-execute message sent to CINCPACFLT at 1635Q, after he had been told by telephone of the execution decision, also assumed that the time zone of the action would be Hotel and that 0700 local would be 1900 hours in Washington. However, at 1614Q, before receiving CINCPAC's prepare-to-execute message, CINCPACFLT sent COMSEVENTHFLT his prepare-to-execute message, specifying 0700 G (Golf) time, which would have been 2000 hours in Washington. Subsequently, when he realized that this discrepancy had occurred, CINCPAC decided to change the time of action from 0700 Hotel to 0700 Golf to conform to CINCPACFLT's message, primarily because the change would give the CVAs an additional hour to prepare for the strikes.

[redacted]

42. This change in time was apparently not realized by Washington principals until 1725, when CINCPAC talked to the DJS about verification of the attack on the Patrol. CINCPAC informed him that he was going to change the strike time from Hotel to Golf, which would make it 2000 hours Washington time instead of 1900.]

[redacted] COPY LBJ LIBRARY

43. When DJS reported this to the Gold Room conferees, who included the JCS and the SecDef, it precipitated some consternation as to whether the time which the CVAs were keeping in the Gulf of Tonkin was different from Saigon time and whether there was a 12- or an 11-hour difference between their time and Washington time. The DJ3 stepped out of the room and called the DDO in the NMCC, asking him to check immediately with the CINCPAC War Room and report back. The DDO did so, and obtained a full explanation from the PACOM J-3, both of the time differences involved between Saigon (Hotel) and the CVAs (Golf) and the change in strike time from Hotel to Golf. The DDO then repeated this explanation to the DJ3.

44. Figure 2, which portrays standard time zones in Southeast Asia, indicates how easily uncertainty over time zones can arise. On the Southeast Asian land mass, time zone borders are extremely irregular; ships at sea south off Hainan Island, if they chose to keep true zone time, would actually be in a different time zone (G) from nearby land areas, not only to the north but also for some distance east and west which are in the (H) time zone.

45. The episode concerning time differences had lasted only 10 minutes, from CINCPAC's 1725 call, and was apparently significant only because of the bother it caused high command authorities.[1]

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[1] The DJ3, in an amplifying note, recalls that he had personally confirmed with CINCPAC that the ships were keeping G-time, prior to this particular episode, and that he had so informed the JCS. However, this apparently did not prevent the uncertainty from again arising during the larger meeting with the SecDef and others, leading to the requirement to reconfirm the facts, as described here.

In commenting on this episode, J-6 points out that the confusion over time of execution could have been avoided had a time zone suffix been used in the JCS execution message, as called for in Paragraph 317, ACP 121D, and adds that although the error in this case was not serious it could be fatal in another occurrence. "Memorandum for Executive Officer, Operations Directorate, J-3," 10 December 1964.

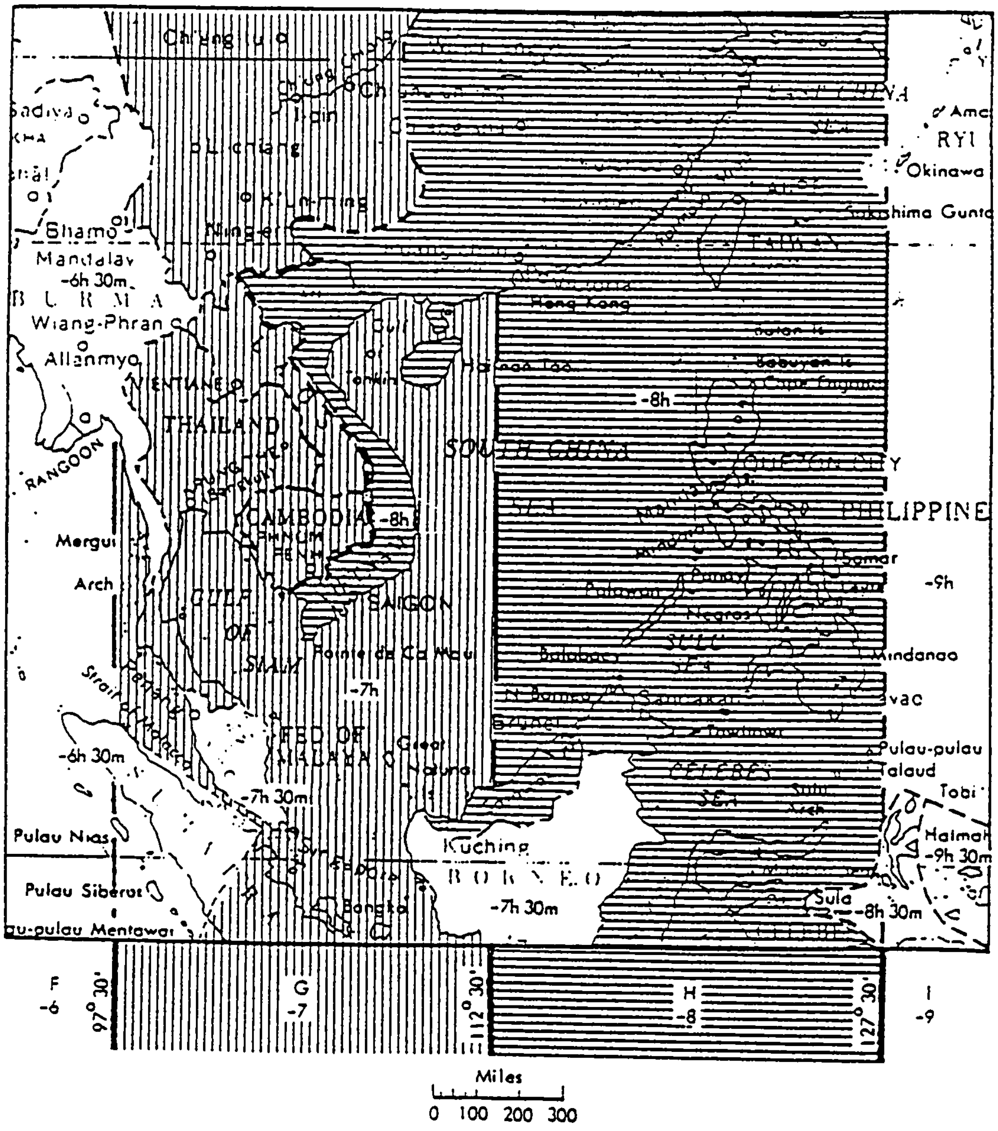

FIGURE 2. Standard Time Zones in Southeast Asia

46. By 1800 then, the uncertainty about the attack on the DESOTO Patrol and about the scheduled strike time had been cleared up. The JCS air strikes against North Vietnam-- which had by this time been given the unclassified nickname PIERCE ARROW -- were on, due to be launched in two hours.

47. By 1800 it had also been decided to carry out a series of alerts and deployments of U.S. forces to strengthen the U.S. military posture in Southeast Asia, as a back-up to the PIERCE ARROW operation. The purpose was to provide a deterrent to escalatory enemy action following the PIERCE ARROW strikes and to be prepared to undertake additional military action against North Vietnam if escalatory action occurred.

48. The alerts and deployments had been the subject of discussion during most of the afternoon's meeting in the Gold Room, probably from 1530 on, after the PIERCE ARROW decision was put in final shape. Here again, the decision was apparently made in a short time and without great difficulty because of the availability of a convenient vehicle for making the decision, CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.

49. OPLAN 37-64, [redacted] OPLAN 37-64 [redacted]

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50. [redacted] OPLAN 37-64 [redacted]

[redacted]

51. After the Gold Room conferees agreed on the foregoing list of forces from OPLAN 37-64, the meeting was adjourned. The SecDef left for the White House to clear the decision with the President. In his 1810 conversation with CINCPAC, the DJS informed him that a series of alerts and deployments based on OPLAN 37-64 were being planned to build up the U.S. posture in the area and improve the ability of the U.S. to react; that he could expect a message concerning it after it was cleared at the White House; and that the message would ask for CINCPAC recommendations on any additional alerts and deployments he desired.

52. With the decision on OPLAN 37-64 deployments, the principal command decisions were in hand. As a response to the attack on U.S. vessels, the U.S. was going to carry out punitive retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam, and back them up with a substantial strengthening of U.S. forces in the area, to confront the enemy with even worse consequences if he wished to escalate the conflict.

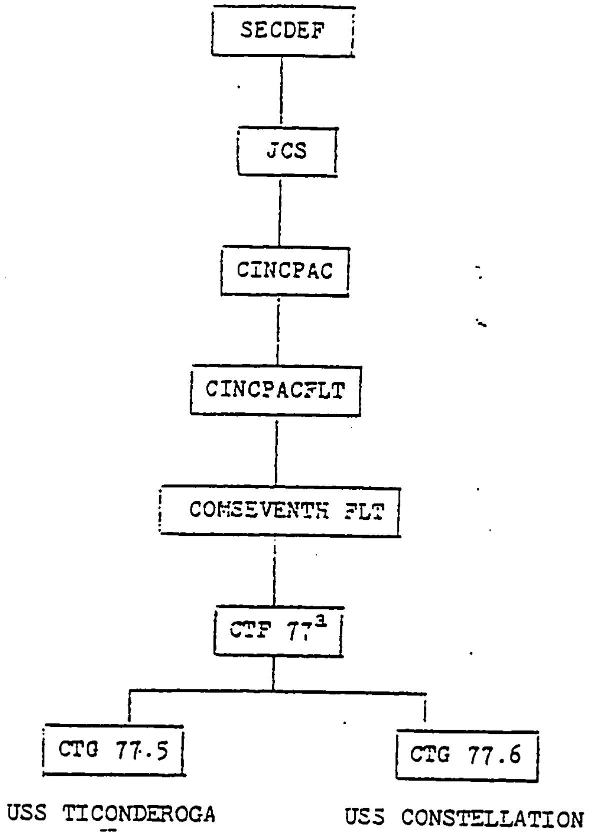
MAKING THE ANCILLARY DECISIONS: PIERCE ARROW

53. Once the basic decisions on PIERCE ARROW and the OPLAN 37-64 deployments were made, the major remaining command problems were (a) the timing and content of a public pronouncement by the President, to the nation and the world, about the nature and purpose of the PIERCE ARROW strikes, and (b) the provision of additional command guidance and interpretation as operational problems arose or as operational information was fed back from implementing command levels (see Figure 3, PIERCE ARROW chain of command). Both required close following of what was occurring at various CINC and subordinate command echelons, so that any ancillary decisions that might be required could be made expeditiously. From the command and control standpoint, this proved to be perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Tonkin Gulf incident.

[redacted]

54. Shortly after 1800, after the meeting in the Gold Room, the SecDef, the CJCS (back from New York), and the ASD/ISA went to the White House to meet with the President. They remained there for a meeting which the President held with Congressional leaders, from 1845 to 2015, to discuss the forthcoming action.

55. At the Pentagon, meanwhile, preparations were being made to follow the PIERCE ARROW strike operations. At about 1815, the DJS directed augmentation of the NMCC, and J-5, J-6, SACSA, and other duty officers were asked to furnish representatives.



[a] COMCARDIV 5, aboard the USS TICONDEROGA.

FIGURE 3. PIERCE ARROW Chain of Command

An EMATS manual circuit was established between PACOM and the NMCC for the exchange of messages. Then, at 1956, a few minutes before the anticipated time of launch -- 2000 hours -- the DDO asked that a secure voice line be held open to receive the expected traffic from PACOM on the takeoff times of the strike aircraft.

56. The DJS remained in the NMCC, in the DDO's office. At about 2030, upon his return from the White House with the SecDef, the CJCS came directly to the NMCC, to have the approved OPLAN 37-64 message sent out, and presumably also to await word of the launch. The SecDef went to his office.

57. At 2040 the SecDef called CINCPAC and asked if there was any information about the launch. CINCPAC said he had not heard yet, that the CVAs would probably provide a coordinated launch report when takeoff was completed. The SecDef explained that he was holding up a Presidential statement to the people, 40 minutes past the time he had told the President the aircraft would be launched. He asked whether CINCPAC could not radio out to the CVAs and obtain an immediate report as to whether the aircraft were taking off, and if not, when; and when the first planes would be over their targets. CINCPAC said he would have CINCPACFLT, who had a direct line to them, try to get an answer.

[redacted]

58. CINCPAC called back at 2110. He had just received word from the TICONDEROGA that estimated time of launch would be in 50 minutes, at 2200. He assumed that the launch was delayed so that the two CVAs could make a coordinated attack. The SecDef asked CINCPAC how serious a Presidential statement would be, at about the time of launch, saying that air action was in execution against gunboats and supporting facilities in and near 4 ports in North Vietnam which were used in support of hostile

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actions against U.S. vessels. CINCPAC advised against mentioning the number and nature of the targets; he agreed that the enemy would be alerted as soon as the aircraft were airborne, but would not know where the aircraft were going. The SecDef subsequently struck any mention of the targets from the statement.

59. CINCPAC's call to the SecDef was monitored in the DDC's office. Shortly thereafter, the DJS left for home (to return later when it seemed that the strikes would actually be launched). The CJCS went to the SecDef's office to confer with him.

60. CINCPAC called again at 2120, raising a question with the SecDef about returning to the hot pursuit restrictions (only to the 3-mile limit for aircraft)[1] after the PIERCE ARROW strikes. He had information indicating that the PTs were likely to remain close to shore, hiding in various estuaries, taking advantage of a 3-mile sanctuary; and he expected that some of the target areas would be vacant. The SecDef said that aircraft going in on strikes should be authorized to attack vessels wherever they found them, but that after the first strike any patrols should attack vessels only outside the 3-mile limit. He added that the CJCS and the DepSecDef, who were with him in his office, agreed.

see

61. At 2225, or about 25 minutes after the TICONDEROGA report had anticipated launch time, the SecDef called CINCPAC again. CINCPAC still had not received a launch report. By this time, however, he had received the flight schedule of the CONSTELLATION aircraft. He informed the SecDef that the CONSTELLATION would be unable to launch its aircraft until 0100, apparently because it had not been able to reach its intended launch position in time. The SecDef asked again about the effect on the

[redacted]

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[1] For details on the rules of engagement problem, see Appendix C.

operation of a Presidential statement after first TICONDEROGA launch. He was assured by CINCPAC that as long as the enemy did not know what the targets were there still would be an element of surprise. The SecDef asked CINCPAC again to get in touch with the TICONDEROGA and make certain her aircraft were launched.

62. The SecDef called again 20 minutes later, at 2245, asking about the launch. He told CINCPAC that the President wanted to go on the air with his statement at 2315, but should not do so without confirmation of the launch. CINCPAC told him he still did not have a report, that it was a matter of getting it through the communications system, and that his circuits were "jammed up." The SecDef again asked that he be informed as soon as possible. He further asked that the CVAs be directed to report every half-hour through the night on aircraft launches, strikes, strike results, any enemy attacks, any unidentified aircraft movements, and the like.

SEC

63. At 2300 CINCPAC again called the SecDef. He still had no word of the launch, but he was concerned about the poor weather in the northern target area. He asked the SecDef's reaction to cancelling the strike against the northern target, which was Port Wallut. The SecDef said it would depend on how bad the weather was, and whether the effect of the weather would be to risk losing aircraft or to risk being ineffective at the target; he said he would not want to lose aircraft. CINCPAC said that both might be involved: the aircraft would have to make a long low run under the overcast, and would be vulnerable, and they would not be able to operate at optimal dive-bombing altitudes. The SecDef repeated that he would not like to risk losing aircraft, and he would not like to risk aircraft straying into China (Port Wallut is quite close to the border) but directed CINCPAC to call him before cancelling the strike.

SEC [redacted]

64. [This call also was monitored in the NMCC, but for a short time, apparently ten or fifteen minutes, there was some misunderstanding about what CINCPAC was suggesting. Throughout the day, in nonsecure telephone conversations, references to the CONSTELLATION had been couched in terms of "the one that came down from the north," i.e., Hong Kong. In the conversation with the SecDef, CINCPAC's references to Port Wallut had been to "the one in the north." Through a slight misunderstanding of the conversation, as a result of the circumlocutory language that had been used for intended security reasons, the impression was created in the NMCC that CINCPAC was suggesting cancelling the strikes from the CONSTELLATION ("the one that came down from the north") because of bad weather in its launch area. This impression was in turn transmitted to the DJS, the DJ3, and the CJCS during the next few minutes, but was apparently straightened out by 2310, when the CJCS went to the SecDef's office to discuss the problem.

65. As in the case of the confusion over Golf and Hotel time, this misunderstanding is not particularly significant, except as an illustration of the type of troublesome occurrence that can arise during a crisis. (It does, however, illustrate one of the hazards of resorting to "double-talk" in attempts to achieve security in nonsecure telephone conversations.)

66. At 2310 the SecDef called CINCPAC (who still did not have a launch report). The SecDef asked whether, if he did not launch strikes against the northerly targets because of weather, there were any reasons why the CONSTELLATION (which was planning to strike the northern targets) should not launch strikes against the southerly targets. CINCPAC agreed that this would be done.

[redacted]

67. Finally, at 2320, CINCPAC called the SecDef and informed him that the first aircraft had been launched at 2243, some]

50 minutes before; and that they would be over target at 0110, or in one hour and 50 minutes. The SecDef was somewhat surprised that it should take them so long to reach their targets. CINCPAC told him that the aircraft were taking off in two waves, the slower ones (propeller-driven A-1s) at 2243, and the faster ones (jets) later, with the intent of joining together over the targets

68. The SecDef called the White House and informed the President Some 15 minutes later, at 2336, the President delivered his television statement. He said that as a result of hostile actions against U.S. ships on the high seas, air action was in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam. He emphasized that this was a limited, but fitting, response, and ~~that the U.S. sought no wider~~ war.

69. Subsequent analysis has shown that TICONDEROGA aircraft were launched at 2243 EDT, but that the purpose of this first launch (of 4 A-1 aircraft) was to orbit over the TICONDEROGA, in order to free the deck for landing A-4 aircraft arriving from Cubi Point in the Philippines and other A-1 aircraft returning from a reconnaissance mission in the Tonkin Gulf; and to permit coordination of propeller and jet aircraft for simultaneous time over target. The first wave of A-1 aircraft did not depart for target until 2335 EDT, some 3-1/2 hours later than Washington command authorities had been expecting them to be able to launch their strikes,[1] and only one minute before the President began his statement.

70. The news that the first aircraft had been launched was received in the NMCC twice, first when CINCPAC's 2320 call to the SecDef was monitored, then at 2323 when the PACOM Duty Officer called the information in to the Pacific Desk officer. Within [redacted]

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[1] J-3 Pacific Division, "CVA Operations Prior to PIERCE ARROW Launches."

the next few minutes the DDC notified the CJCS, the DJS (who was just returning to the Pentagon), the DJ3, and other high-ranking officers. The Pacific Desk officer notified all the war/situation rooms in a conference call. This pattern of notification was repeated throughout the night, as telephone and message information on the strikes was received.

71. After calling in the information that the first aircraft had been launched, CINCPAC returned to his other operational problems. At 2350 he called the CJCS, with the DJS monitoring in the DDO's office. He said he would like to cancel the strike against Port Wallut because of the bad weather at the target, the long distance from the CVA, and the fact that he was squeezed for aircraft. He would like to shift the aircraft planned for the Port Wallut strike to the next target to the south, Hon Gay. He also said he would like to plan a second strike at the Vinh/Phuc Loi POL facilities, but was not clear as to whether he had to request authority to do so. The CJCS replied that he did, and that he would take it up with the SecDef right away.

72. The CJCS went to the SecDef's office, but apparently was unable to speak to him immediately because the SecDef was with newsmen. He took advantage of the opportunity to call CINCPAC back for more details. CINCPAC explained that the CONSTELLATION had conducted air operations all the previous night and personnel were tired. In addition, the CONSTELLATION did not make as much advance from Hong Kong toward the Tonkin Gulf as he had hoped, because it had had to turn into the southwesterly wind frequently for landing and launching aircraft; it was thus behind its intended launch position and would have to launch late. The TICONDEROGA, which was smaller, did not have as many aircraft. Altogether, CINCPAC said, he was not happy about

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the number of aircraft; there were a lot of targets for a "one-shot" operation, distances were long and CVAs would undoubtedly have to use a good many strike aircraft as refuelers. He would like to recycle aircraft in order to do the job properly.

73. Prior to this verbal report from CINCPAC at 2400, Washington command authorities had essentially been unaware of these serious operational difficulties which were not only affecting the timing of the strikes but could also impair their effectiveness. If this information had been available to them sooner as an input, it might well have caused them to alter some of their previous decisions.

74. After discussing the restrike question with the SecDef, the CJCS called CINCPAC again at 0040. The decision was that CINCPAC could recycle up to about 20 aircraft, on the understanding that they would be used to insure maximum destruction of the POL facilities in the Vinh/Phuc Loi area (the top priority target), and provided they could launch by 0400. The CJCS emphasized that PIERCE ARROW was not intended to be an open-ended affair; CINCPAC should get off what aircraft he could by 0400, and then should stop the operation.

75. The restrike decision was the last of the high command decisions relating specifically to the PIERCE ARROW action. CINCPAC did call subsequently, at 0345, to get permission to withdraw the DESOTO Patrol vessels from the Gulf temporarily, for replenishment of the ammunition and fuel they had used up, and was granted it, but this was not related to the CVA air strikes as such. The major remaining activity in Washington related to the strikes was concerned with obtaining strike and post-strike information, disseminating it to those who required

[redacted]

it (including high command authorities), and evaluating the results.

76. Information on the results of initial strikes began arriving at about 0215, both by telephone from CINCPAC and by SITREP messages from CTG 77.5 and 77.6, the TICONDEROGA and the CONSTELLATION, which were received by EMATS circuit. The military assistant to SecDef apparently remained awake all night, taking phone calls from the PACOM Duty Officer and keeping in touch with the NMCC for copies of the SITREP messages.

77. The last activity, which continued well into the morning of the 5th, was to collate SITREP information and prepare a "box score" of PIERCE ARROW strikes and results, with briefing materials, for presentation to the CJCS and the SecDef. A great deal of double-checking of the information was necessary, between the NMCC and the office of the CNO, and between the SecDef's office and PACOM, because of overlapping and conflicting evaluations. Finally, at 0900, the SecDef held a press conference in which he gave a summary of the air strikes and results and answered detailed questions. Then he and the CJCS went to the White House to brief the President. PIERCE ARROW was essentially terminated.

U 78. Figure 4 recapitulates the PIERCE ARROW strikes and results, as compiled by the NMCC on the 5th of August, as corrected in the light of subsequent information.

MAKING THE ANCILLARY DECISIONS: OPLAN 37-64 DEPLOYMENTS

79. As indicated in paragraph 51 above, CINCPAC was notified by the DJS at 1810 hours on 4 August that a series of alerts and deployments involving OPLAN 37-64 forces had been decided upon, and that he could expect a message about it as soon as it was

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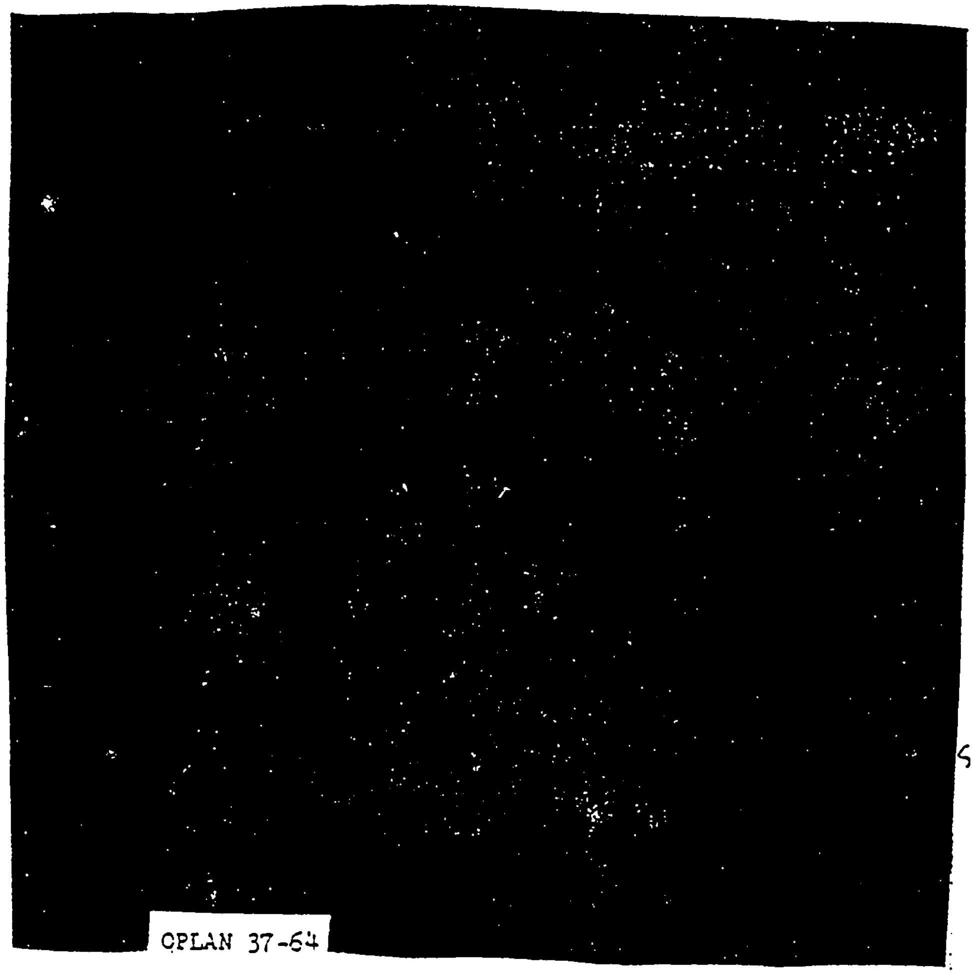

OPLAN 37-64

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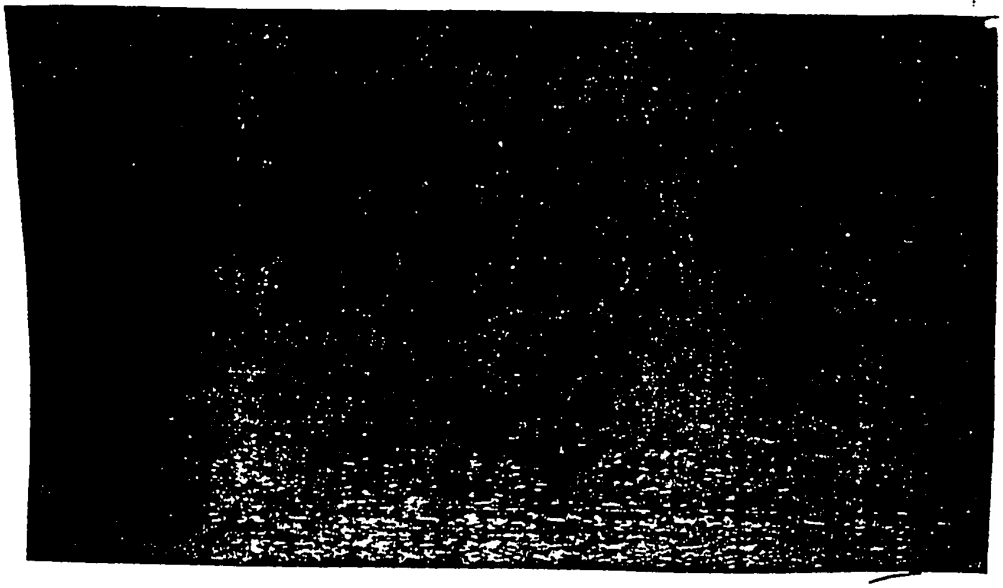

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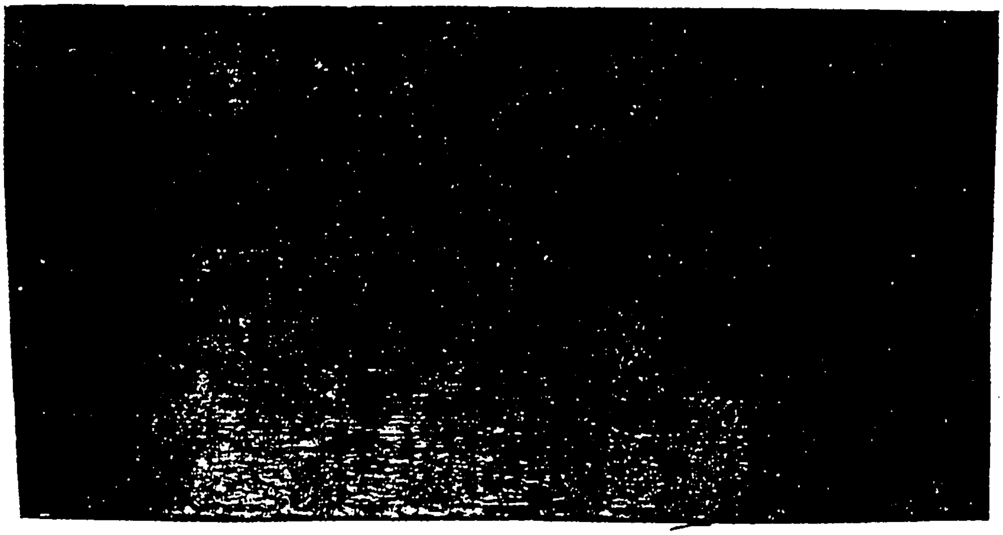

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OPLAN 37-64
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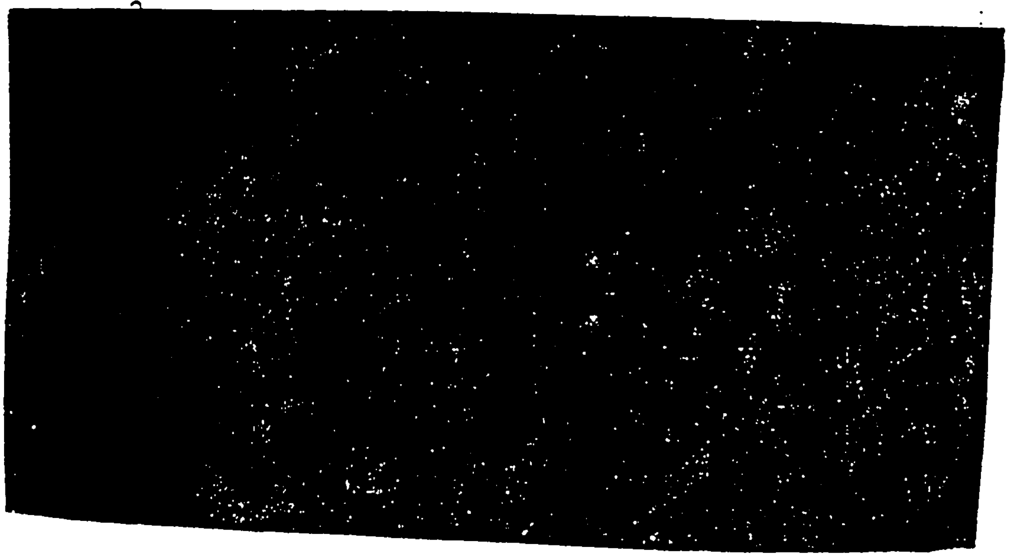

NMCC OPERATIONS DURING THE CRISIS[1]

OPLAN 37-6-

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[1] The NMCC was manned by several Operations Teams in turn during the Tonkin Gulf crisis; each team confronted somewhat different conditions, and each operated somewhat differently. The account here is quite general, and does not apply in detail to every team involved.

[2] At the time of the August Tonkin incident, the NMCC was not in its present (temporary) facility but in its former location between the C-D rings between the 8th and 9th corridors.

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OPLAN 37-64

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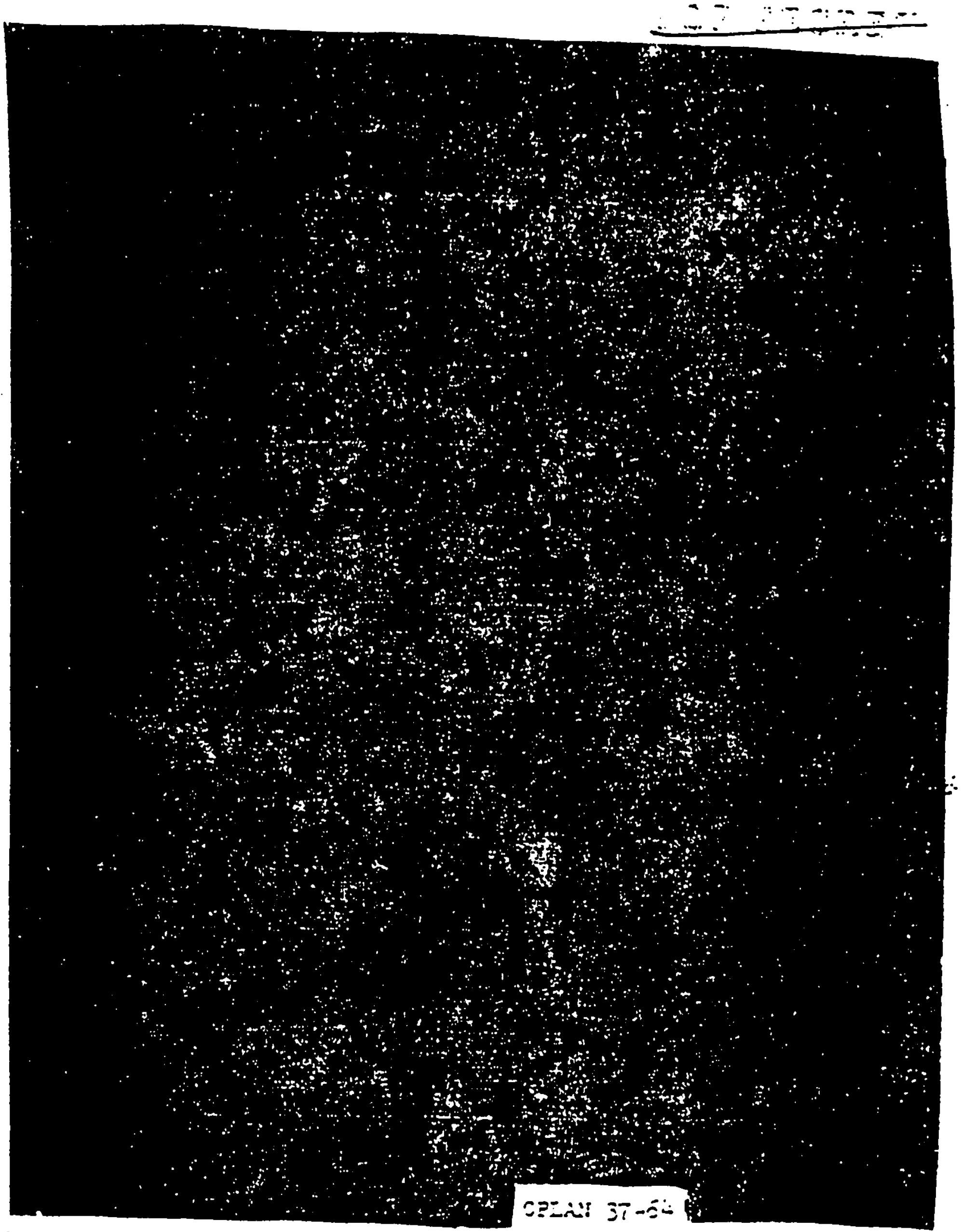
PAGES 53-55



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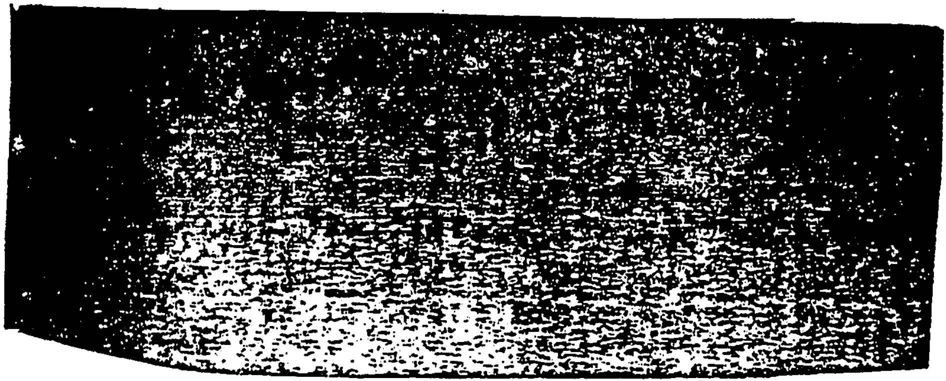

- 146. The JCS did not use the NMCC Conference Room during the decision period of the crisis. On the morning of the 5th, however, they met there to be briefed on the PIERCE ARROW strikes and the OPLAN 37-64 deployments, and to transact other business.

147. No Master Check List (MCL) was issued during the course of the incident. The nature of the PIERCE ARROW concept was that it would be a one-shot operation, ostensibly closed once it was executed. Follow-through action was not contemplated unless direct enemy reaction should occur as a result of the strikes. Thus, preparation of an MCL was not indicated initially, nor was there much likelihood that it would be subsequently. Only one item was temporarily earmarked for possible inclusion in an MCL if circumstances warranted producing one. That was CINCPAC's recommendation for additional alerting and deployment of OPLAN 37-64 augmentation forces, which itself was not intrinsically part of PIERCE ARROW.

[redacted]

PAGES 58-73

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

COMMAND DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

183. As a crisis, the Tonkin Gulf incident of 4-5 August stands out as a one-time, limited application of force in retaliation against a Communist country for taking a specific hostile action against U.S. forces, backed up by a substantial reinforcement of the U.S. posture in the area to deter or deal with any further hostile acts.

184. It was the first significant military action of the post-war period in which the concept of measured retaliation was actually put into practice, and its immediate success seems clear. It also showed U.S. willingness to escalate a military situation if it deemed it necessary.

185. The Tonkin Gulf affair was treated within the U.S. Government largely as a straightforward military operation, not requiring the great volume of interagency consultation and coordination that has characterized most recent crises. Furthermore, since this was an all-U.S. operation, there was no coordination and little consultation with other nations.

186. From the command standpoint, the main features of the incident were the rapidity with which the basic decisions were made, in a matter of hours, and the extremely short notice given to execute the retaliatory air strikes and make the reinforcement deployments.

187. Although the strike and deployment decisions were, as is to be expected, tailored to fit the specific situation, the decision-making was facilitated because detailed planning and staff work that was applicable had already been carried out, in anticipation of a possible requirement to take

retaliatory action against North Vietnam and to reinforce our military forces in the area.

188. One of the outstanding characteristics of the episode was the fact that the Joint Staff played a major role in the decision-making phase. Knowledgeable action officers from the Joint Staff, specifically from J-3 divisions, were brought directly into the highest-level meetings to provide information for decision. The information resources of the Staff were fully utilized by the top political authorities and coordination of the effort was effected primarily by the DJS. This development is a notable exception to accustomed practice in the past and indicated a recognition by the top command authorities of the valuable assets embodied in the Joint Staff.

189. While the basic decisions were being formulated, there were opportunities for the DJS to confer with CINCPAC, to alert him to the fact that retaliatory action against boats and supporting POL facilities in designated areas was being considered, and to elicit his recommendations in connection with the contemplated action.

190. However, the decision as to the timing of the strikes was made without the knowledge that it was not feasible for the CVAs involved to execute the strikes at such short notice, and without adequate weather data for the Tonkin Gulf region. While CONCPAC's communications (voice and TTY) with the Pentagon were good, and permitted the rapid exchange of information, he was unable to establish voice communications with the CVAs, and teletype communications with them were slow. The result was that CINCPAC did not receive the up-to-date information on the operational readiness of the CVAs and their scheduled launch times until hours after Washington command authorities

had expected the strikes to be mounted. He had apparently not been kept fully informed on the status of the carriers.

U 191. The delay in the strikes created a command problem primarily in connection with the timing of a Presidential statement to the nation and the world about the nature and purpose of the action, which could not be made until the strikes were actually underway.

U 192. In connection with the air strikes, the principal follow-on determinations that were required were whether to cancel the planned strike against one of the targets, due to weather and other factors; and whether to recycle aircraft for a second strike against another target. Questions like this were handled directly between CINCPAC and either the SecDef, the CJCS, or the DJS, on the telephone.

U 193. Procedural problems did arise during the ancillary OPLAN 37-64 decisions, especially in the matter of notification of pertinent organizations. Warning time in some cases was wasted by the slowness of messages, or by failure to transmit messages to the commands concerned.

NMCC OPERATIONS

U 194. Despite problems of congestion and confusion, the NMCC functioned as intended, serving as the center for information on the episode. Certain physical inadequacies of the NMCC were pointed up. The augmentation alone crowded the room, while the large influx of outsiders seeking information added heavily to the problem of congestion and noise. People from other interested agencies tended to come in person to the NMCC for information, rather than depending upon telephone calls. This tendency was also furthered by the lack of a secure telephone system to or within the Joint Staff area. Since the NMCC is intended to be the central point for information, this reliance upon it for this service was a tribute to its performance. To fulfill this function without undue confusion or congestion will, however, require changes in NMCC facilities and procedures.

U 195. The DDO's office was the point of contact between the NMCC and the higher-ranking officers and officials, while the Team Chief ran NMCC operations per se and served as the main NMCC contact point for the NMCC alternates, the White House Situation Room, the State Department Operations Center, and the Service War Rooms. Some duplication of function was apparent, but this is probably an inevitable consequence of the pressures and confusion of the moment.

U 196. The crisis also illustrated the truth that under the present arrangements the DDO and the Team Chief must divide their attention during any specific crisis, despite its intensity, in order to provide a worldwide surveillance of other potential trouble areas. The Congo and Cyprus represented such distractions during the Tonkin Gulf affair.

MESSAGE FLOW

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025. Median reproduction times for hard copies of telegraphic messages in the JCS Message Center approximated one hour for FLASH and IMMEDIATE precedence messages and almost two hours for PRIORITY messages. As may be expected, however, during times of unusually heavy reporting, message reproduction times were extended for several additional hours.

U 206. Alerts transmitted by telephone from CINCPAC to the NMCC provided important information from WESTPAC on the average about 15 minutes faster than did telegraphic methods. Telephone alerts as to the existence of messages provided an important follow-up to early location of some information and messages that might otherwise have involved lengthy delays. The fact that secure phones were not utilized for many important conversations made alerting more difficult, and attempts to be obscure in the interests of preserving security made some of the conversations ambiguous.

APPENDIX A

POLICY AND PLANNING BACKGROUND OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS OF 2 AND 4 AUGUST 1964

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APPENDIX A

POLICY AND PLANNING BACKGROUND OF THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS OF 2 AND 4 AUGUST 1964

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this appendix is to summarize national policy and military planning developments in the months prior to the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incidents. These developments had direct relevance to the 4-5 August decisions to execute the PIERCE ARROW strikes and to undertake the [OPLAN 37-64] deployments.

DISCUSSION

NSAM 288

[2. In mid-March 1964, a National Security Council Action Memorandum (NSAM 288) expressed concern over the apparent increase in Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam (DRV) assistance to the Pathet Lao and to the Viet Cong. The memorandum postulated a series of actions which, with minimum risk of retaliation, the U.S. might take to discourage the continuation of DRV assistance to the Communist rebels in South Vietnam and Laos. It also outlined a variety of measures which might serve to strengthen the counterinsurgency effort in the two nations and stimulated a new cycle of contingency planning at various echelons of the U.S. military establishment. The basic concept underlying the potential military measures envisaged in the memorandum was the application of a series of pressures to enhance border control. Subsequently, if required, military pressures on North Vietnam itself would generally be increased in intensity. At first, the U.S. role in intensifying pressures would be primarily covert, with the South Vietnamese military establishment, under U.S. guidance,]

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carrying out most of the contemplated actions. Hence, the first phase of the intensified activity would be primarily an extension of the small-scale covert sabotage operations within the borders of North Vietnam which had been carried out sporadically by South Vietnamese forces under the guidance of Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) since February. In addition, several other alternative courses of action also were being considered: SE

a. The advisability of high-level overflights of South Vietnamese border areas to enhance border surveillance;

b. The authorization of hot pursuit over the Laos border in connection with the South Vietnamese ground operations in the vicinity of territorial boundaries;

c. The initiation on 72 hours' notice of control actions along the Laotian and Cambodian borders going beyond overflights and hot pursuit; and

d. The adoption of a program of retaliatory actions and graduated overt military pressure against targets in North Vietnam.[1]

3. Although the JCS earlier had approved numerous plans for the defense of Southeast Asia, including the basic U.S. plan, CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64,[2] the new NSAM required still more planning activity.

CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.

4. The day after NSAM 288 was issued, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to prepare a contingency plan for expanding combined South Vietnamese-U.S. actions in the following step-by-step categories:

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[1] NSAM 288, 17 March 1964, TOP SECRET.

[2] CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 was approved by the JCS early in 1964. This OPLAN is divided into several phases. It provides for almost any contingency in Southeast Asia from insurgency to overt attack on Southeast Asian countries by North Vietnamese and/or Chinese regular forces. SE [redacted]

a. Border control actions in Laos-Cambodia, with a 72-hour reaction time;

b. Retaliatory actions against North Vietnam, with a 72-hour reaction time; and

c. Graduated overt military pressures against North Vietnam on 10 to 30 days' notice.[1]

5. To meet the new requirements, CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 was developed. This plan, approved in April 1964, is a unilateral capabilities plan envisaging the employment of U.S. PACOM forces in support of and in coordination with South Vietnamese forces in military operations designed to assist in stabilizing the situation in South Vietnam.

[redacted] CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, [redacted]

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[1] Message JCS 5390 to CINCPAC, DTG 191133Z March 1964, TOP SECRET.

[2] FARMGATE aircraft are U.S. aircraft utilized in a combat training program for South Vietnamese pilots.

7. If a decision to implement OPLAN 37-64 were made, tactical command and control of all the forces involved in Phase I and Phase II operations would be carried out through COMUSMACV. In Phase III, which could include the alert and deployment of both CONUS-based and PACOM forces not usually controlled by COMUSMACV, the arrangements would be more complex. Basically, however, operational control of all ground and air forces deployed in his area would be assumed by COMUSMACV upon their arrival, with direct liaison with Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand (COMUSMACTHAI) authorized.[1]

THE 94 TARGET LIST

8. Concomitant with the development of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, a list of targets by type and results if destroyed or damaged was developed and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

9. The first draft of what subsequently was to become the so-called "94 Target List" was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at their meeting of 27 May 1964. They agreed to forward the target list and its appendices to the Secretary of Defense and to furnish copies to CINCPAC and CINCSAC. The target list was so forwarded on 30 May, as an enclosure to JCSM 460-64 to the Secretary of Defense. The memorandum of transmittal divided the targeting options open to the U.S. in retaliating against the North Vietnamese--with the objective of discouraging their continued support of the Pathet Lao (PL) and the Viet Cong (VC)--into the following three categories:

a. Targets which, if totally or partially destroyed, would bring a reduction of DRV support of PL and VC actions in Laos and South Vietnam;

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[1] In August 1964, COMUSMACV and COMUSMACTHAI were the same individual. However, the staffs utilized in performing the two functions were different, and located in Saigon and Bangkok, respectively.

b. Targets which, if destroyed, would reduce the DRV military capability to take action against Laos and South Vietnam; and

c. Significant industrial targets, the destruction of which would reduce or completely eliminate the already limited North Vietnamese capacity to continue as an industrially viable state.

10. In the opinion of the JCS, actions to accomplish the task in category (a) should include armed reconnaissance along highways leading to Laos and strikes against targets such as airfields, supply and ammunition depots, POL storage depots, military headquarters and barracks connected with PL/VC support and infiltration. To accomplish the task in category (b)--reduce the DRV military capability to take action against Laos and South Vietnam--the JCS believed that it would be necessary to strike at the remaining airfields, important railroad and highway bridges and supply and ordnance depots in North Vietnam and to accomplish aerial mining and strikes at the POL storage facilities at Hanoi and Haiphong. Accomplishment of the task in category (c) would require still more widespread strikes against North Vietnamese targets, including industrial complexes.[1]

11. Subsequently, a more detailed target list was prepared in response to a request from the Secretary of Defense. From this more detailed target list, a decision-maker could select a number of options--from minor to full-scale destruction--of selected types of targets. The second draft of the target list was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at their meeting of 30 May and was forwarded to the Secretary of Defense.[2]

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[1] JCSM 460-64 to the Secretary of Defense, 30 May 1964, TOP SECRET.
[2] JCS 2431/383-1 dated 28 May 1964, TOP SECRET. Decision on 30 May 1964.

the necessity for making clear that the U.S. was not assuming any commitment, but simply was undertaking to formulate bilateral contingency plans to deal with possible future events.[1]

15. After discussing the substance of the Ambassador's recommendations, the National Security Council requested, on 25 July, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff furnish recommendations on appropriate military actions which would accomplish the following objectives:

a. Contribute militarily to the success of the counter-insurgency effort in South Vietnam;

b. Reduce the frustration and defeatism of the South Vietnamese leadership by undertaking punitive measures against the enemy outside the South Vietnamese borders;

c. Entail minimum risk of escalation of the war by the enemy; and

d. Require minimum U.S. participation in a combat role.[2]

THE JCS RESPONSE TO THE NEW NSC REQUIREMENT

16. At their meeting of 27 July, the JCS decided to forward to the Secretary of Defense the recommendations drawn up in response to the NSC requirement.[3]

[redacted]

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[1] Message, Saigon to SECSTATE, EMBTEL 214, 25 July 1964. TOP SECRET.

[2] JCS 2343/426, dated 26 July 1964, TOP SECRET.

[3] JCSM 639-64 to the Secretary of Defense dated 27 July 1964, TOP SECRET. Copy forwarded to CINCPAC.

PAGES 89 - 90

in South Vietnam and Laos. Two by-products of these deliberations were available to aid the decision-makers when it became necessary to formulate a response to the PT attacks on the USS MADDOX in international waters. These by-products were CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 and the so-called "94 Target List." The latter was a detailed assessment of targeting options in North Vietnam from which decision-makers could choose among a wide range of retaliatory options.

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APPENDIX B

THE DRV ORDER OF BATTLE

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THE DRV ORDER OF BATTLE

PURPOSE

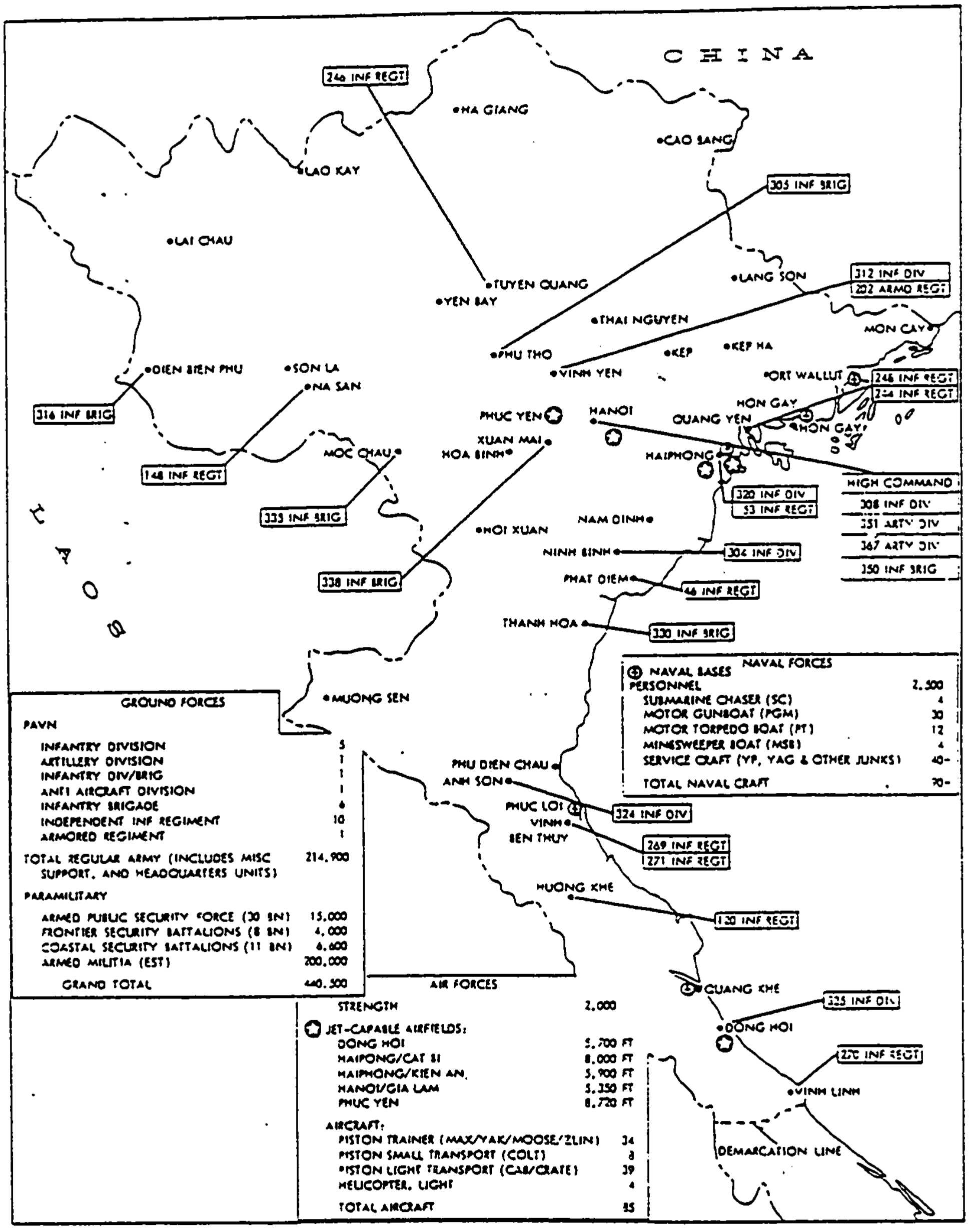
1. The purpose of this appendix is to describe briefly the North Vietnamese order of battle as it existed at the time of the August 1964 attacks on U.S. vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin.

DISCUSSION

2. The 1954 Geneva cease-fire agreements had ended the earlier war between the French and the Vietnamese Communists and had partitioned Vietnam. Throughout the following decade, the DRV leaders of the Communist state in the northern sector had been engaged in modernizing their military forces. The principal objective was to supplement the guerrilla force which had fought against the French with a more regularized, better equipped, and better trained Army. Reforms were introduced gradually. Despite the backward economy, by mid-1964 a regular Army which, by Southeast Asian standards, is comparatively well trained, disciplined, and equipped had been created. A small Navy also had been established. Although the 1954 armistice terms prohibited the introduction of military aircraft into North Vietnam, liaison and transport aircraft had been furnished by Communist China and some pilots had been trained in China.

3. The estimated disposition of North Vietnamese air, ground and naval forces as of early August 1964 is depicted in Figure 1.

4. The antiaircraft order of battle for North Vietnam presented in Table I is believed to represent a close



GROUND FORCES

PAVN	
INFANTRY DIVISION	5
ARTILLERY DIVISION	1
INFANTRY DIV/BRIG	1
ANTI AIRCRAFT DIVISION	1
INFANTRY BRIGADE	6
INDEPENDENT INF REGIMENT	10
ARMORED REGIMENT	1
TOTAL REGULAR ARMY (INCLUDES MISC SUPPORT, AND HEADQUARTERS UNITS)	214,900
PARAMILITARY	
ARMED PUBLIC SECURITY FORCE (30 BN)	15,000
FRONTIER SECURITY BATTALIONS (8 BN)	4,000
COASTAL SECURITY BATTALIONS (11 BN)	6,600
ARMED MILITIA (EST)	200,000
GRAND TOTAL	440,500

NAVAL FORCES

⊕ NAVAL BASES	
PERSONNEL	2,500
SUBMARINE CHASER (SC)	4
MOTOR GUNBOAT (PGM)	30
MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT (PT)	12
MINESWEEPER BOAT (MSB)	4
SERVICE CRAFT (YP, YAG & OTHER JUNKS)	40-
TOTAL NAVAL CRAFT	70-

AIR FORCES

STRENGTH	2,000
✪ JET-CAPABLE AIRFIELDS:	
DONG HOI	5,700 FT
HAIPONG/CAT BI	8,000 FT
HAIPHONG/KIEN AN.	5,900 FT
HANOI/GIA LAM	5,350 FT
PHUC YEN	8,720 FT
AIRCRAFT:	
PISTON TRAINER (MAX/YAK/MOOSE/ZLIN)	34
PISTON SMALL TRANSPORT (COLT)	8
PISTON LIGHT TRANSPORT (CAB/CRATE)	39
HELICOPTER, LIGHT	4
TOTAL AIRCRAFT	85

*Sources: PACOM, Weekly Intelligence Digest, No. 33-64, SECRET, NOFORN; DIA, Strength and Disposition of Foreign Navies, AP-1-230-1-18-INT, dated July 1964, pp. 25-26, SECRET

Figure 1. North Vietnam Disposition of Military Forces as of Early August 1964*

approximation of that nation's general capabilities for AAA defense during the 1-6 August time period.

TABLE I. North Vietnamese Antiaircraft Order of Battle[a]

Number of Guns:[b]	735
Number of Occupied Positions:[c]	119
Number of Unoccupied Positions:	Well over 300
Number of SAMs	0

[a] Data are as of mid-September 1964. Source: DIA Intelligence Bulletin, 21 September 1964, p. S-5, SECRET.

[b] Mostly Soviet models; about 1/2 deployed in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

[c] Occupied AAA positions are thought to hold 384 light, 401 medium, and 10 automatic weapons. Approximately 60 percent of the light guns are 37mm; 405 are 57mm. Ninety percent of the medium guns are 85mm; 10 percent are 100mm.

5. As these data indicate, the regular North Vietnamese military capability in mid-1964 posed far less of a threat to the vastly superior U.S. PACOM forces than the irregular threat against Laos and South Vietnam, which had prompted the United States to weigh several new courses of action which might serve to discourage continued North Vietnamese assistance to the Pathet Lao and the Viet Cong.

6. No attempt has been made to outline the entire Chinese Communist order of battle. However, the enemy air capability in South China was of vital concern during the Tonkin incident. As of October 1964, it was estimated that 150 light jet bombers and 360 jet fighters could be supported in North Vietnam and South China. The major bases from which Chinese jet aircraft could deploy are Ling Shui and Hai-k-ou on Hainan Island and Sui-ch-i, Nan-ning and Liu-chou in South China. The locations of these bases are depicted in Figure 2.

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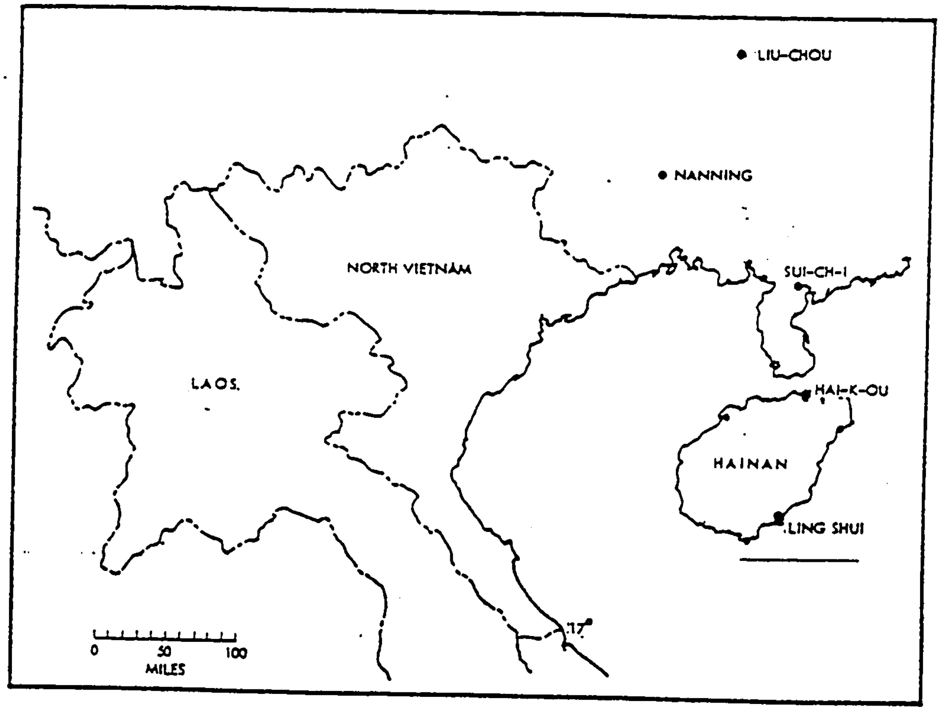

FIGURE 2. Jet-Capable Airfields in South China

APPENDIX C

THE FIRST AND SECOND ATTACKS ON THE DESOTO PATROL: 2 AND 4 AUGUST 1964

APPENDIX C

THE FIRST AND SECOND ATTACKS ON THE DESOTO PATROL:
2 AND 4 AUGUST 1964

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this appendix is to describe the first and second attacks on the DESOTO Patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin that occurred in August 1964, which precipitated the PIERCE ARROW operation. Emphasis will be placed upon events in the operational area. Command decisions taken in Washington and other aspects of the incidents have been discussed elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

[redacted]

3. At the tactical level, command and control of DESOTO Patrol operations was accomplished through COMSEVENTHFLT, with the destroyers assigned to this mission constituting a Task Unit within one of COMSEVENTHFLT's Task Forces. From COMSEVENTHFLT, the chain of command went upward through CINCPACFLT to CINCPAC and the JCS.

4. Within the Joint Staff, primary responsibility for monitoring the DESOTO Patrols had been assigned to the Joint

Reconnaissance Center of J-3. However, the NMCC also received SITREPs and certain other message traffic relating to the patrols.

5. The initial DESOTO Patrol in the Tonkin Gulf was carried out during February and March by the destroyer USS CRAIG. During this period, the CRAIG was authorized to approach as close as four n.mi. to the coast of the mainland of North Vietnam. The patrol was successfully concluded without incident.[1]

6. On 30 July, the USS MADDOX (TU 72.1.2) commenced a second DESOTO Patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin. The destroyer was authorized to approach as close as eight n.mi. to the coastline of North Vietnam and was required to remain four n.mi. away from the coastline of certain North Vietnamese-owned islands. As had been the case with the earlier patrol, the MADDOX was assigned to certain tracks between fixed points and was to adhere to a stipulated schedule in patrolling between these points.[2]

7. At first, the MADDOX's patrol proceeded as planned. The first hint of potential difficulty came at 1554 EDT on 1 August. At that time, the commander of the MADDOX reported that possible enemy reactions to the destroyer's movements could be anticipated in the vicinity of Point Charlie, one of the designated points on his patrol track. The commander stated that he had received information indicating such hostile action was probable in the near future.

8. At 1648 EDT on 1 August, the commander of the MADDOX reported that he had terminated orbit of Point Charlie and was proceeding due east at ten knots until daylight, to avoid the possibility of hostilities. A heavy concentration of junks had been sighted to the north.[4]

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[1] Message, Secretary of State to Saigon, 2 August 1964, 2 P.M., CONFIDENTIAL, Flash; readdressed SECSTATE to JCS for JRC DTG 021800Z August 1964.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Message, CTU 72.1.2 to AIG 181, DTG 011954Z August 1964, SECRET/NOFORN.

[4] Message, CTU 72.1.2 to AIG 181, DTG 012048Z, SECRET/NOFORN.

9. By 2300 EDT, the MADDOX again was changing her course, this time to avoid a concentration of an estimated 75 junks. The destroyer reported that no evidence of any hostility was apparent.[1]

THE FIRST ATTACK ON THE MADDOX

10. The NMCC had been monitoring the MADDOX's SITREPs since the first report of potential trouble had been received during mid-afternoon of 1 August. At 0130 EDT on 2 August, the NMCC received yet another report from the MADDOX. She had picked up three torpedo boats on a southerly course headed towards her at extreme range -- over ten miles. At the time the PT boats appeared on the radar screen, the MADDOX was about 30 miles away from the North Vietnamese coastline.[2]

11. At 0340 EDT, the destroyer reported that she was being approached by the high-speed patrol craft, whose apparent intent was to conduct a torpedo attack. The speed of the oncoming hostile craft was estimated at between 45 and 50 knots. The MADDOX reported that she intended to open fire in self defense if necessary.[3]

12. At 0408 EDT, the MADDOX reported being attacked by the three PT craft. After three warning shots had failed to slow the attackers, she had opened fire with her 5-inch battery. By this time, two PT craft had closed to within 5,000 yards of the MADDOX and were continuing their closing maneuvers. Each had fired one torpedo. The MADDOX had changed course to evade the torpedoes, which passed within 100 to 200 yards of the destroyer on its starboard side.[4] About the same time, the

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[1] Chronology in NMCC files concerning the first MADDOX incident.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Message, CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 020808Z, SECRET. Advance copy received NMCC at 020903Z.

aircraft carrier TICONDEROGA (TG 77.5) advised that she was sending four already-airborne F8Es (Crusaders) armed with ZUNI rockets and 20mm ammunition to provide air cover to the MADDOX. The pilots of the TICONDEROGA aircraft were instructed not to fire unless either the MADDOX or the aircraft were fired upon.[1]

13. At 0421 EDT, the third PT boat had moved up to the beam of the MADDOX and had received a direct hit by a 5-inch round. A torpedo dropped in the water by this PT was not seen to run. All three PTs apparently directed machine gun fire at the MADDOX, but no materiel or personnel damage was sustained by the U.S. destroyer. The MADDOX was continuing in a southerly direction to join the DD USS TURNER JOY. By this time, at the request of the MADDOX, the TICONDEROGA aircraft had begun attacking the three PTs. The aircraft carried out ZUNI rocket runs and 20mm strafing attacks against two of the PTs, which were reported damaged. The third PT remained dead in the water after presumably having been hit earlier by gunfire from the MADDOX.[2]

14. At 0429 EDT, the aircraft from the TICONDEROGA broke off the attack and escorted the MADDOX back towards South Vietnamese waters. The TURNER JOY had joined the MADDOX and both were continuing to patrol international waters -- but waters further from the North Vietnamese coastline -- with aircraft from the TICONDEROGA providing cover.[3]

15. Approximately two hours after the encounter was over, COMSEVENTHFLT directed CTG 77.5 aboard the TICONDEROGA to carry out maximum photo reconnaissance of the attacking PT craft, including the one which was last seen dead in the water. Photo-recce aircraft were not to overfly North Vietnam or its territorial waters inside a three-mile limit.[4] Although the weather

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[1] Message, CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 020808Z, SECRET. Advance copy received NMCC at 020903Z.

[2] Chronology in NMCC files concerning the first MADDOX incident.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CTG 77.5, readdressed Flash from CINCPACFLT, Info JCS et al. DTG 021018Z, received NMCC 021131Z.

was deteriorating, one RF-8 from the TICONDEROGA was dispatched to the attack area. It located only one PT proceeding north at high speed. Photographs taken at a low run angle resulted in only two photos of poor quality.[1]

16. Available data do not indicate the precise time when the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, the President and other key officials in Washington first were notified that an attack on the MADDOX had occurred. However, by mid-morning on 2 August, EDT, all were informed of the incident. Some were summoned to a meeting at the White House to discuss what the U.S. should do in response.

RESUMPTION OF DESOTO PATROL AFTER FIRST ATTACK

17. Even before the highest echelons of the national command authority had begun to discuss what decisions and actions were required by the first attack on the destroyer MADDOX, the matter was under discussion within PACOM.

18. At 0704 EDT on 2 August, CINCPACFLT informed CINCPAC and COMSEVENTHFLT that, in his opinion, it was to the best interest of the United States to assert its right of freedom of the seas and to resume the patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin as soon as possible. CINCPACFLT therefore directed COMSEVENTHFLT, unless otherwise directed, to conduct a new patrol with two destroyers. The patrol was to commence as soon as feasible. The track specified was:

a. When ready, proceed to point C, arriving first day. Thence northward to point D during daylight hours. Return to east during darkness.

b. Second day: Proceed to point D, then south toward point C, retiring at night as before.

c. Third day: Proceed to point L and patrol toward point M, retiring to the east at night.

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[1] Message CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 021506Z, SECRET.

d. Fourth day: Proceed to point M and patrol toward point N, retiring at night.

e. Fifth day: Return to point N and retire to the south through points C and P and terminate the patrol.[1]

19. This patrol track was the one initially utilized when the DESOTO Patrol subsequently resumed its operations in the Tonkin Gulf. It is depicted at Figure 1.

20. In the same message, CINCPACFLT specified that unless otherwise directed the new patrol was to come no closer to the North Vietnamese coast than 8 n.mi.; it was to remain 4 n.mi. from islands possessed by North Vietnam.[2] Hence, the limitations on approaching enemy territory which CINCPACFLT would have imposed would have been the same as those which had governed the operations of the MADDOX at the time of the first attack.

21. Within two hours, CINCPAC had indicated his concurrence with the recommendations of CINCPACFLT, However, CINCPAC requested JCS approval of the proposal and cautioned CINCPACFLT not to begin the new patrol until it had been approved by the JCS.[3] These instructions were passed to the commanders of the MADDOX and TURNER JOY through the normal chain of command. While awaiting JCS approval, the destroyers were refueling and taking other measures to insure their readiness to resume patrol when directed.[4] If resumption were approved, the two-destroyer patrol was to be commanded by COMDESDIV 192 aboard the MADDOX serving as CTG 72.1.

22. At 1325 EDT (2 August), the JCS transmitted its approval of the resumption of the Tonkin Gulf patrol. The routes and times suggested by CINCPACFLT were to be utilized, but the

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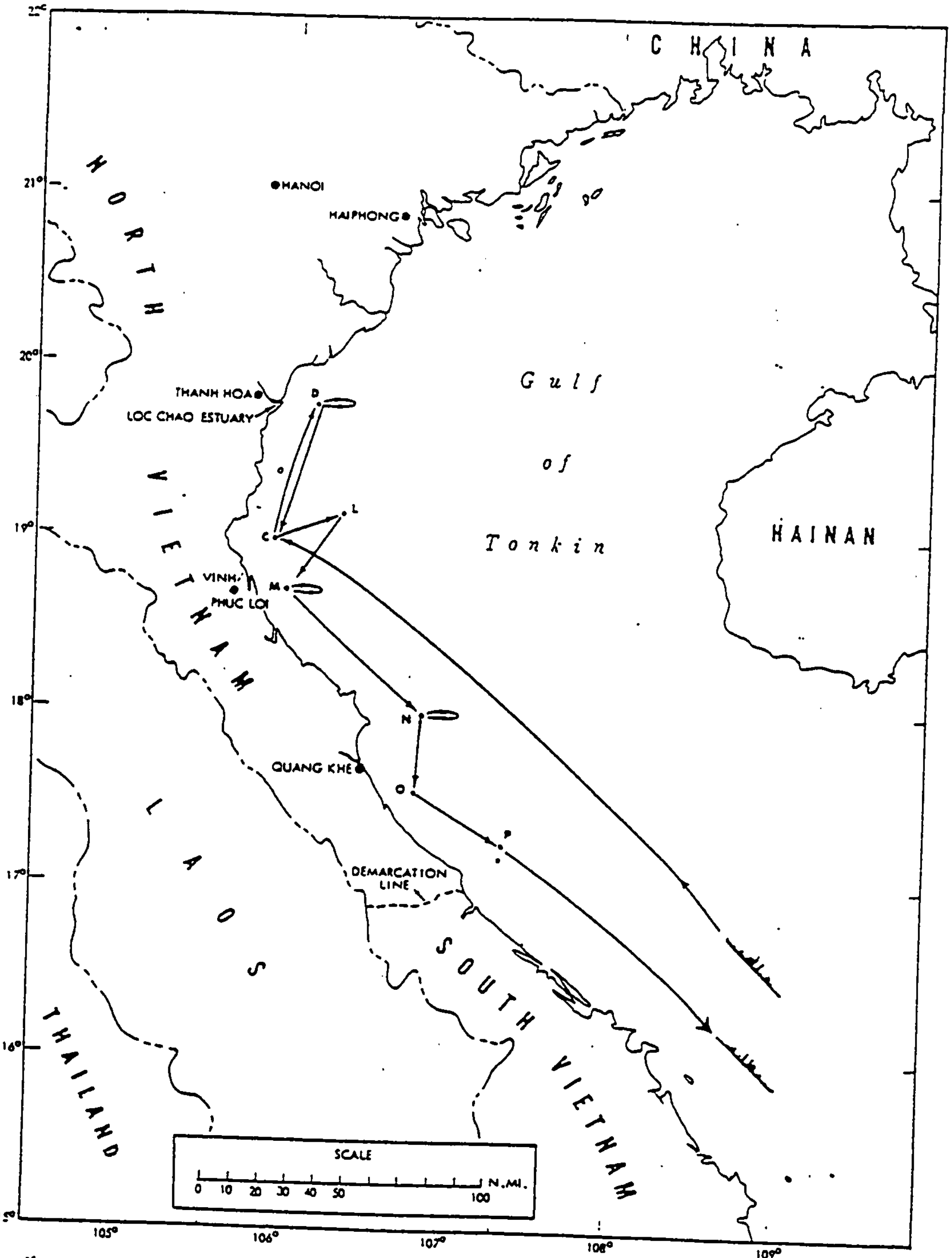
[1] Message CINCPACFLT to CINCPAC and COMSEVENTHFLT DTG 021104Z, SECRET. Info: CNO, COMUSMACV, CTF 72, CTG 72.1, CTG 77.5, CTG 77.6, et al. The JCS was not an addressee, although a copy was sent to the JCS to pass to the JRC.

[2] Ibid.

[3] ADMINO CINCPAC to JCS and CINCPACFLT, DTG 021255Z, SECRET. Info: COMSEVENTHFLT, COMUSMACV, CNO, and J-3 for JRC.

[4] Message CTG 77.5 to COMDESDIV 192, DTG 021404Z, SECRET. Message CINCPACFLT to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 021407Z, SECRET.



*Source: Msg. CINCPACFLT to CINCPAC and COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 02 1104Z, SECRET; Graphics display in NMCC files, SECRET.

FIGURE 1. Track Initially Utilized When DESOTO Patrol was Resumed After First Attack on the USS MADDOX *

JCS directed that the patrol remain 11 -- instead of 8 -- nautical miles from the coastline of the North Vietnamese mainland. The JCS also stipulated that air cover be provided during daylight hours. The aircraft were to patrol to the seaward of the two destroyers in order to preclude any possibility of overflight of North Vietnam. The DESOTO patrol also was directed to avoid close approaches to the North Vietnamese coast during those periods when maritime activities related to COMUSMACV's special operations (COMUSMACV OPLAN 3[illegible] were underway.[1]

23. Although the exact time sequence is not known, the JCS instructions concerning resumption of the Tonkin Gulf patrol were issued, presumably, after the problems arising from the first attack on the MADDOX had been discussed at the White House. During the White House meeting, the President approved these courses of action:

a. DESOTO patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin were to be continued;

b. The force on patrol was to be doubled, with two destroyers carrying out operations instead of one;

c. Combat air patrol over the DD's was to be furnished; and

d. The patrol force was to be directed to drive off and destroy any force attacking the U.S. force.[2]

The "shoot to destroy" aspect of this guidance was emphasized at the highest echelons of the national command authority, and the U.S. response to the first attack was publicly announced at noon on 3 August.[1]

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[1] Message JCS 7680 to CINCPAC, DTG 021725Z, SECRET. Info: American Embassy, Saigon; COMUSMACV; CINCPACFLT; COMSEVENTHFLT; CNO; CTF 72; CTG 72.1; CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6, et al.

[2] Message OASD/PA to all CINCS for Public Affairs Officers DTG 032336Z, UNCLASSIFIED. Info: COMUSMACV, JCS, et al.

24. At 0327 EDT on 3 August, the new DESOTO patrol arrived in the vicinity of its first fixed orbit point, point C.[2] The two destroyers in the patrol, the MADDOX and the TURNER JOY, constituted TG 72.1. Continuous air cover was being provided, as directed, by the CVA TICONDEROGA (TG 77.5). At 0345 EDT the patrol reported no unusual activity thus far and conveyed its intentions to patrol from point C to D and then to retire to the east prior to darkness in the operational area. (Because of the time difference, usually it will be daylight in the Tonkin Gulf when dark in Washington, and vice-versa.)

[redacted]

25. [As the destroyers continued to carry out their patrol, the two principal command and control problems being addressed elsewhere were:

a. Efforts to coordinate the DESOTO patrol track with the track of other vessels transiting the Gulf of Tonkin as a part of COMUSMACV's special operations, thereby avoiding potential interference of one mission with the other; and

b. Attempts to clarify certain ambiguities in the rules of engagement governing DESOTO patrol operations.

DESOTO Patrol Interactions with COMUSMACV Special Operations

SECRET

26. Since COMUSMACV's modest infiltrative, sabotage and psychological warfare campaign inside North Vietnam was]

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[1] New York Times, quoting White House Press Release, 4 August 1964, UNCLASSIFIED.

[2] For the contemplated patrol track, 3-7 August, see Figure 2, p. 20 above.

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covert, access to some details concerning the operation required special clearances. In addition, COMUSMACV presumably was given considerable latitude in working out the details and timing of these operations.

27. Once the 2 August decision to resume the DESOTO patrol in the Tonkin Gulf had been made, a requirement arose to coordinate the movements of the patrol with those of the forces under COMUSMACV's OPCON also transiting the Gulf of Tonkin.

[redacted]

28. At 1335 EDT on 2 August, the JCS had approved use of the patrol track suggested earlier by CINCPACFLT. The principal preoccupation in Washington at that time was to insure that the patrol be resumed as quickly as possible. Only later, apparently, did persons at the various command echelons begin to be aware of a requirement to coordinate the whereabouts of the two DESOTO patrol destroyers with the movements of the covert forces transiting the Gulf of Tonkin under COMUSMACV's OPCON.

SECRET

29. At 2022 EDT (2 August), COMSEVENTHFLT requested COMUSMACV to furnish as soon as possible information concerning his special operations south of the planned DESOTO patrol itinerary so that interference with COMUSMACV's operations could be avoided.[1]

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[1] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to COMUSMACV, DTG 030022Z, TOP SECRET, LIMITED DISTRIBUTION. Info: CINCPAC, JCS, CINCPACFLT.

An advance copy of this message was furnished to the NMCC Operations Team on duty, which apparently had no information on the special operations to which COMSEVENTHFLT referred.[1] In his reply, COMUSMACV requested that units under the OPCON of COMSEVENTHFLT (which included the DESOTO Patrol) remain clear, on 3-4 August, of the area above the 17th parallel among and west of an imaginary line defined by these points:

A) 17-00 N, 1-8-20 E

B) 17-58 N, 107-11 E.[2]

COMUSMACV added that between 5-10 August he desired COMSEVENTHFLT units to avoid certain locations.[3] Upon receipt of this information, COMSEVENTHFLT at 0152 EDT on 3 August directed the CVA TICONDEROGA and the two DDs in the DESOTO Patrol to comply with COMUSMACV's stipulations.[4]

SECRET

[redacted]

30. Some seven hours later, COMUSMACV modified his original designation, requesting that COMSEVENTHFLT units remain north of Latitude 19-10 until 060600 H.[5] At the time this message

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[1] Notation on NMCC copy of message.

[2] Message COMUSMACV to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 030335Z, TOP SECRET, LIMITED DISTRIBUTION. Info: CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, JCS.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CTG 77.5 and CTG 72.1, DTG 030552Z, TOP SECRET. Info: CINCPAC, JCS, CINCPACFLT, COMUSMACV.

[5] Message COMUSMACV to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 031231Z, TOP SECRET, Flash. Info: CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, JCS.

was received in Washington, the DESOTO Patrol, as had been directed earlier, was south of this line. It was almost five hours after COMUSMACV's FLASH message was transmitted before COMSEVENTHFLT directed that during its next day's (4 August) operations the DESOTO Patrol remain north of Latitude 19-10 N on the track between points C and D.[1]

31. Shortly after this COMSEVENTHFLT informed CINCPACFLT that since coordination with COMUSMACV's operations required confining the DESOTO Patrol to a limited track some sixty miles in length, unless otherwise directed he intended to instruct the destroyers to terminate the patrol sooner than planned. Under this arrangement, the patrol would have proceeded on 4 August to point D, then would have moved southward toward point C, arriving at Latitude 19-11 N at nightfall. It then would have proceeded due east to Longitude 107 E, where it would have terminated the patrol three days sooner than originally planned, proceeding southeast instead on 5 August to rendezvous with the TICONDEROGA.[2] This message from COMSEVENTHFLT to CINCPACFLT was received in the NMCC over four and a half hours after transmission. It was immediately brought to the attention of the CJCS, who directed that PACOM be directed to modify the DESOTO Patrol tracks not as COMSEVENTHFLT had suggested, but in such a way that the destroyers could stay on patrol for the five-day period originally contemplated.[3]

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[1] COMSEVENTHFLT to COMDESDIV 192 (aboard the MADDOX), DTG 031710Z, SECRET. Info: JCS, et al.

[2] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CINCPACFLT, DTG 031712Z, TOP SECRET. Info: CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, JCS, CTG 77.5, COMDESDIV 192.

[3] EA Tapes, DTG 032212Z.

32. In response to the Chairman's request, at 1951 EDT on 3 August a JCS message confirming and expanding upon earlier telephone directions to CINCPAC was transmitted. The JCS directed that in order to keep the DESOTO Patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin without its having to enter COMUSMACV's unauthorized zone, the patrol track should be modified. The new track stipulated by the JCS for the patrol was:

a. Remain in an area bounded by point D (19-10 N, 105-55 E; 19-10 N, 107-00 E and 19-47 N, 107-00 E) until 052200Z (051800 EDT); then

b. Rejoin the track at point C and conduct the remainder of the patrol as originally planned; and

c. Complete the patrol by 081100Z (080700 EDT) in order to be east of 108-00 E longitude as requested by COMUSMACV.[1] This patrol track is depicted at Figure 2.

33. A few hours later, after having received the JCS message, CINCPAC recommended to the JCS yet another modification of the DESOTO Patrol track.[2] Apparently, this recommendation was not approved; it soon was to be overtaken by events.

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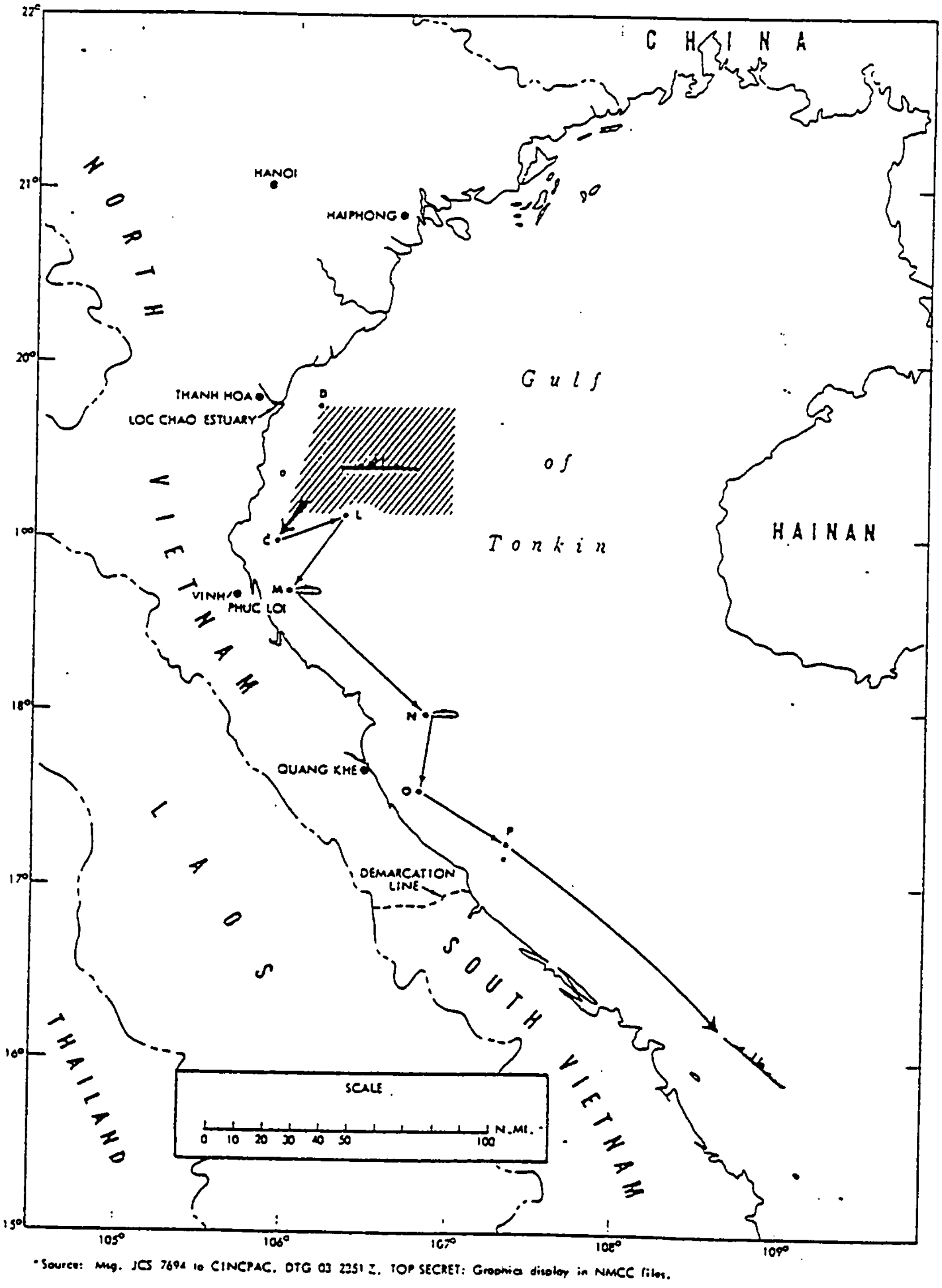
[1] Message JCS 7694 to CINCPAC, DTG 032351Z, TOP SECRET. Info: White House, SECSTATE, SECDEF, COMUSMACV, COMSEVENTHFLT, CINCPACFLT, et al.

[2] Message CINCPAC to JCS, DTG 040331Z, TOP SECRET. Info: CINCPACFLT, COMSEVENTHFLT, COMUSMACV.



*Source: Msg. JCS 7694 to CINCPAC, DTG 03 2351 Z. TOP SECRET; Graphics display in NMCC files.

FIGURE 2. JCS 3 August Modification of DESOTO Patrol Track

Attempts to Clarify the DESOTO Patrol Rules of Engagement

34. When the DESOTO Patrol had begun to execute its mission on 30 July, it was authorized to approach only as close as 8 nautical miles to the North Vietnamese mainland and was directed to remain at least four nautical miles from North Vietnamese islands. It was to fire only if fired upon, and presumably was operating without air cover.[1] When the first attack on the patrol occurred on 2 August, several already airborne aircraft from the CVA TICONDEROGA were dispatched to the scene of the attack and did, as directed, fire upon the attacking PT boats after these attackers had launched torpedoes at the DD MADDOX. No hot pursuit was attempted.[2]

35. The JCS message directing resumption of the DESOTO patrol after the first attack on the MADDOX, dispatched at 1325 EDT on 2 August, specified that the new patrol should remain 11 nautical miles from the North Vietnamese mainland and that its air cover should patrol to the seaward of the two destroyers assigned to the new patrol to avoid any possible overflight of North Vietnam.[3] The JCS furnished no guidance at this time concerning hot pursuit. The earlier directions from CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT concerning conduct of the patrol if its resumption were approved by the JCS had not addressed the question, either.[4]

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[1] Message SECSTATE to Saigon, 2 August 1964, 2 p.m., CONFIDENTIAL.

[2] Chronology in NMCC files concerning first MADDOX incident.

[3] Message JCS 7680 to CINCPAC, DTG 021725Z, SECRET.

[4] Message CINCPACFLT to CINCPAC and COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 021104Z, SECRET; message ADMINO CINCPAC to JCS and CINCPACFLT, DTG 021255Z, SECRET.

36. After the President had emphasized the importance of "shoot to destroy" guidance to the new DESOTO patrol, the JCS attempted to clarify the hot pursuit issue. At 1837 EDT on 2 August, the JCS directed that if U.S. vessels were attacked 11 nautical miles or more off the North Vietnamese mainland coast in international waters, every effort should be made to destroy the attacking forces. However, pursuit into "hostile waters or airspace" was not authorized.[1] Since the U.S. had no record of the North Vietnamese position on what it considered to be its territorial waters (some nations claim 12 nautical miles seaward), and since the instructions to the patrol on how close it could approach to the North Vietnamese mainland had been changed several times, the choice of the phrase "hostile waters or airspace" proved somewhat ambiguous.

37. At 0153 EDT on 3 August, when directing the TICONDEROGA to furnish air cover to the patrol and to maintain other aircraft on alert to enhance the capability to shoot to destroy if a new attack occurred, COMSEVENTHFLT noted that the rules of engagement were ambiguous. He said he was attempting to obtain clarification. Meanwhile, he directed, U.S. aircraft -- as well as naval vessels -- were to pursue no closer than 11 nautical miles to the mainland of North Vietnam. U.S. forces were to remain 4 nautical miles away from the islands off the North Vietnamese coast.[2]

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[1] Message JCS 7681 to CINCPAC, DTG 022337Z, SECRET, flash. Info: AMEMBASSY SAIGON, COMUSMACV, CINCPACFLT, COMSEVENTHFLT, CNO, CTF 72, CTG 72.1, CTG 77.5, CTG 77.6, *et al*.

[2] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CTF 77, DTG 030553Z, TOP SECRET. Info: JCS, CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, USS TICONDEROGA, USS MADDOX, USS TURNER JOY, *et al*.

38. A few hours later, COMSEVENTHFLT was more specific. He maintained that he interpreted "hostile waters" to be those within 11 n.mi. of mainland North Vietnam. He directed that neither U.S. ships nor U.S. aircraft were to approach any closer to the mainland, even in pursuit. COMSEVENTHFLT added that this restriction did not preclude U.S. pursuing forces from continuing to fire at attackers who had retired to a position less than 11 miles from the mainland, provided that U.S. forces continued the engagement from outside the 11-mile limit.[1]

39. At 1953 EDT on 3 August, CINCPAC dispatched a message to the JCS. He argued that if hot pursuit must stop 11 miles offshore, the U.S. thereby was drastically reducing the time available to its ships and aircraft for destroying the attackers. He pointed out that the current rules of engagement provided no clear definition of the term "hostile waters and airspace." Although he interpreted the term to be synonymous with the territorial waters and airspace of the offending country, there was some ambiguity over what the U.S. recognized to be the limits of these territorial waters and airspace. CINCPAC concluded by recommending that:

a. The DESOTO Patrol be permitted to approach within 8 miles of mainland North Vietnam, thereby keeping 5 miles clear of the three-mile territorial limit claimed for itself by the U.S.;

b. Hot pursuit into the territorial waters and airspace of the hostile country be authorized; and

c. Pursuit to the three-mile limit be authorized if recommendation b. were not approved.[2]

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[1] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CTG 77.5 and CTG 72.1, DTG 031010Z, TOP SECRET. Info: CINCPAC, CINCPACFLT, JCS, COMUSMACV, et al.

[2] Message CINCPAC to JCS, DTG 032353Z, SECRET. Info: CINCPACFLT.

40. The Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed CINCPAC's recommendations on the morning of 4 August, but decided not to accept all of them. At 1033 EDT, just nine minutes before the MADDOX opened fire on the PT boats carrying out a second attack against the DESOTO Patrol -- and after indications of an imminent attack had been brought to the attention of the NMCC and the JCS -- the rules of engagement were clarified. The JCS directed that:

a. The closest approach of the DESOTO Patrol to the North Vietnamese coastline would be 11 n.mi.; and

b. In event of a hostile attack on U.S. forces, aircraft only were authorized to pursue and attack the hostile forces up to three nautical miles of the North Vietnam mainland.[1]

PREPARATIONS TO RESUME THE DESOTO PATROL

41. Even before the JCS directed resumption of the DESOTO Patrol, the USS MADDOX, which had emerged from the first attack undamaged, and her sister destroyer, the USS TURNER JOY, had been replenished and refueled at sea. However, it was not possible to repair at sea certain communications and radar deficiencies of the two vessels. The MADDOX reported that her HICOM and DURATT communications were unsatisfactory.[2] She was utilizing instead her ship-to-shore facilities and a combat information detection (CID) circuit for communication with Task Force 77 units, which included the CVAs TICONDEROGA (TG 77.5) and CONSTELLATION (TG 77.6). The MADDOX's air search radar also was inoperative. The TURNER JOY reported that her fire control radar was not functioning and that the estimated time of repair was indefinite.[3]

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[1] Message JCS 7700 to CINCPAC, DTG 041433Z, TOP SECRET.

[2] HICOM is an on-line, self-encrypting system capable of carrying traffic classified through TOP SECRET. The system links all major commands and echelons of the same commands down to the fleet commander level. It is available to some CVAs at sea, and was installed on the USS MADDOX as part of the special Patrols in the Tonkin Gulf. DURATT is a duplex radio teletype system.

[3] Message CTU 72.1 to AIG 181; DTG 021443Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info CNO; CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6; COMUSMACV; COMNAVSTAPHIL; et al.

42. When reporting these deficiencies, the Task Group commander added that, in his opinion, there was a high likelihood that in the future all U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf would be treated as belligerent from their first detection by DRV forces. He pointed out that the enemy PTs had the advantage of being able to hide in junk concentrations transiting the Gulf, allowing attack from short range with little or no warning, especially at night. He drew attention as well to the fact that the MADDOX was too short-legged for a long patrol where high speeds might be required for evading enemy PTs. Moreover, he stated, the armament of the MADDOX was not too well fitted for anti-PT operations, even in daylight.[1]

43. Despite these problems, in order to resume the DESOTO Patrol rapidly, it was necessary to utilize the destroyers MADDOX and TURNER JOY. No others equipped with the special communications equipment carried aboard DESOTO Patrol vessels transiting the Tonkin Gulf were available in the WESTPAC area.

44. After the JCS had directed immediate resumption of the patrol, the MADDOX and the TURNER JOY constituted Task Group 72.1, with the Task Group commander embarked aboard the MADDOX. Although the CVA TICONDEROGA (TF 77.5) was engaged in certain reconnaissance missions (Operation YANKEE TEAM), it was to furnish combat air patrol for the two destroyers during daylight hours. Subsequently, on 3 August, the CVA CONSTELLATION (TG 77.6) left Hong Kong to rendezvous with the TICONDEROGA. The CONSTELLATION, too, was directed to furnish some air cover to the DESOTO Patrol once it reached the area in which the Patrol was operating.

45. COMSEVENTHFLT had directed CTF 77 that in the event of another unprovoked attack on the DESOTO Patrol, it was mandatory

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[1] Message CTU 72.1 to AIG 181; DTG 021443Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info: CNO; CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6; COMUSMACV; COMNAVSTAPHIL; et al.

that a maximum effort be made to achieve the complete destruction of the attacking units. COMSEVENTHFLT therefore had instructed CTF 77 to maintain in support of the DESOTO Patrol:

a. A minimum of two F-8 or A-4 craft to furnish airborne CAP during daylight hours, with the aircraft to be on call to COMDESDIV 192 (CTG 72.1) and positioned over the watching DD;

and

b. A preloaded strike group of eight to twelve aircraft ready to launch on fifteen minutes notice.[1]

[redacted]

47. The chain of command between the DESOTO Patrol, the CVAs TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION and the JCS is depicted in Figure 3.

INITIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OPERATIONAL AREA

48. At 0327 EDT on 3 August, the new DESOTO Patrol arrived at the vicinity of its first fixed orbit point, Point C.

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[1] Message COMSEVENTHFLT to CTF 77, DTG 03055sZ, TOP SECRET. Info: CNO; JCS; CINCPAC; CINCPACFLT; CTG 77.6; COMUSMACV; COMDESDIV 192; USS TICONDEROGA; USS MADDOX; USS TURNER JOY.

[2] Ibid.

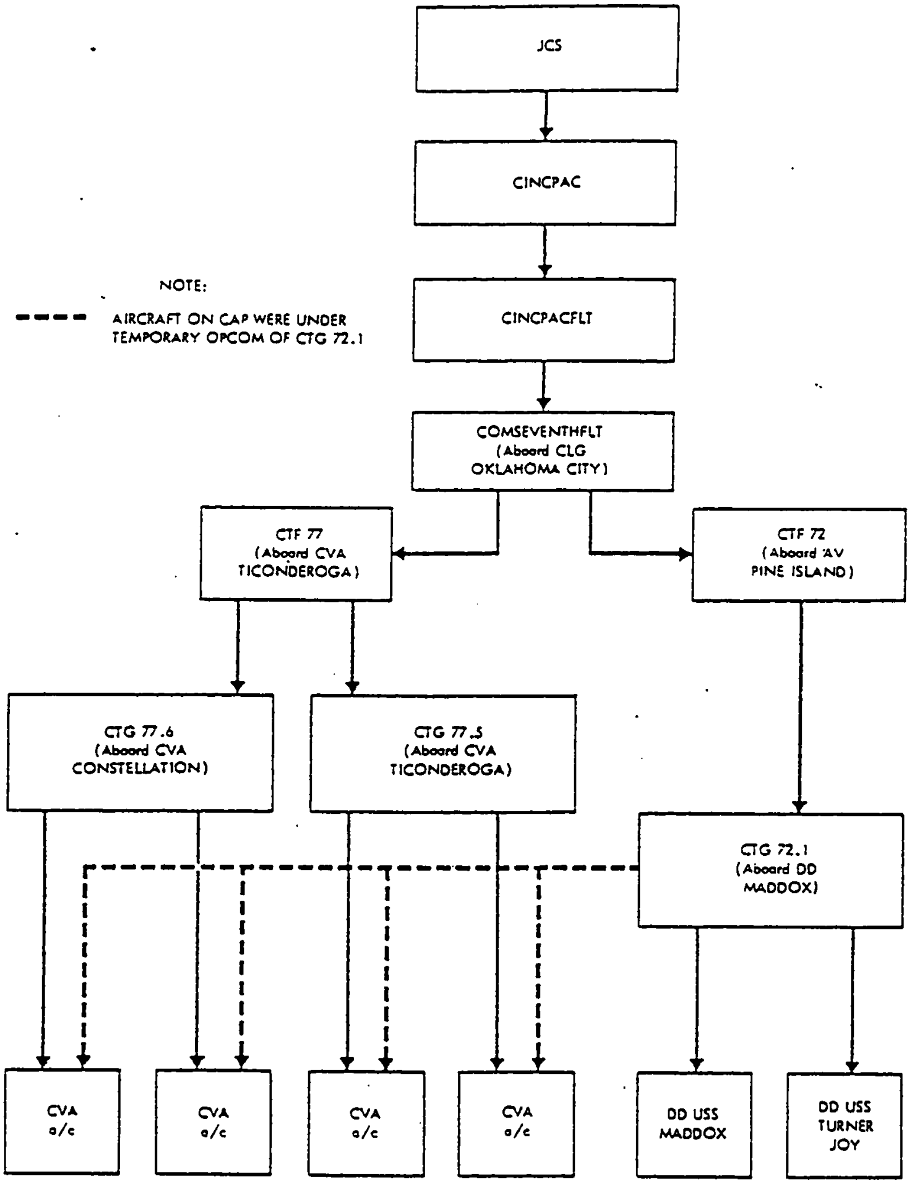
JCS
CINCPAC
CINCPACFLT
NOTE:
AIRCRAFT ON CAP WERE UNDER TEMPORARY OPCOM OF CTG 72.1
COMSEVENTHFLT (Aboard CLG OKLAHOMA CITY)
CTF 77 (Aboard CVA TICONDEROGA)
CTF 72 (Aboard AV PINE ISLAND)
CTG 77.6 (Aboard CVA CONSTELLATION)
CTG 77.5 (Aboard CVA TICONDEROGA)
CTG 72.1 (Aboard DD MADDOX)
CVA a/c
CVA a/c
CVA a/c
CVA a/c
DD USS MADDOX
DD USS TURNER JOY

FIGURE 3. Chain of Command Between the DE SOTO Patrol, its Air CAP, and the JCS

(The track contemplated for the five-day patrol is depicted in Figure 1, page 94). The Patrol reported at 0345 EDT that no unusual activity had been noted thus far. The Patrol Commander conveyed his intentions to patrol from Point C to Point D and then to retire to the east prior to darkness in the operational area.[1] Condition I, during which all battle stations are manned, had been set until retirement and the CVA TICONDEROGA (TG 77.5) was providing a continuous combat air patrol (CAP) overhead. The MADDOX's air radar, which had been inoperative earlier, again was functioning properly.[2]

49. At 1146 EDT on 3 August, the MADDOX reported that she was steaming away from the North Vietnamese coastline for the night as directed. She reported that a surface contact had paralleled her movements, including zigzagging with her for about an hour. She strongly suspected shadowing by Bloc Patrol/PT craft.[3] By this time, presumably, the air CAP had returned to the CVA TICONDEROGA and was not scheduled to be replaced until the following day, Gulf of Tonkin time.

50. At 0840 EDT on 4 August, after night had fallen the operational area, the DESOTO Patrol Commander (CTG 72.1) reported that he had received information indicating that an attack by PGM-4s was imminent. He stated that the two patrolling destroyers were near the position of 19-10.7 North, 107-00 East and proceeding southeast at best speed.[4] A little more than an hour later, at 0936 EDT, CTG 72.1 reported sighting two unidentified vessels (SKUNKs) and three unidentified aircraft (BOGEYs) in the DESOTO

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[1] Because of the time difference, usually it is daylight in the Gulf of Tonkin when dark in Washington and vice versa.

[2] Message CTG 72.1 to AIG 181, DTG 030745Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info: CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6; COMUSMACV; Director NSA; MADDOX; TURNER JOY; CNO.

[3] Message CTU 72.1.2 to AIG 181, DTG 031546Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info: CNO; CTG 77.5: COMUSMACV; Director NSA; USS TURNER JOY: USS MADDOX.

[4] Message CTG 72.1 to AIG 181, DTG 041240Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info: CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6; TURNER JOY; MADDOX; COMUSMACV; Director NSA.

Patrol area.[1] This message was received on the combat information detection (CID) network by the CVA TICONDEROGA and retransmitted to COMSEVENTHFLT who subsequently retransmitted the message to the JCS, CINCPAC, and others. Immediately upon receipt of this information, CTG 77.5 aboard the USS TICONDEROGA launched two F-8s and A4Ds to establish a new CAP over the DESOTO Patrol DDs. These aircraft were to be followed by four A-1Hs launched fifteen minutes later.[2]

51. At 1008 EDT, the USS TICONDEROGA transmitted another message, also apparently received on the CID net from the DESOTO Patrol. The BOGEYs had disappeared from the DESOTO Patrol's radar screen and the SKUNKs were maintaining a distance of about 27 miles. Aircraft from the USS TICONDEROGA continued to maintain a CAP/strike posture over the Patrol.[3]

THE ENGAGEMENT IN THE TONKIN GULF

52. At 1034 EDT, CTF 77.5 (USS TICONDEROGA) relayed another message presumably received by CID link from the DESOTO Patrol. New SKUNKs had been contacted at 13 miles and had closed to 11 miles of the DESOTO Patrol. They were evaluated as hostile. The two original SKUNKs were then 40 miles away. TICONDEROGA aircraft continued to maintain a CAP/Strike/Recce posture over the DESOTO Patrol.[4] At 1040 EDT, the MADDOX commenced firing on a closing hostile PT boat.[5]

53. At 1048, EDT, CTF 77.5, again relaying a message from the DESOTO Patrol, reported that two hostile PTs on the beam of the MADDOX were closing to ten miles and that the two PTs 40 miles

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[1] Message CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 041336Z, SECRET. Info: CTG 72.1 and CTG 77.6. Readdressed COMSEVENTHFLT to JCS; CINCPAC COMUSMACV; CNO; CINCPACFLT at 041348Z.

[2] Message CTG 77.5 to AIG 181, DTG 041336Z, SECRET.

[3] Message CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT and CTF 72, DTG 041408Z, SECRET. Info: CINCPAC JCS, CINCPACFLT; CNO; CTG 72.1; CTG 72.4; COMUSMACV, CTG 77.6; *et al*.

[4] Message CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 041434Z, SECRET. Info: JCS, *et al*.

[5] Message CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041442Z, UNCLASSIFIED. Info: JCS, CNO, CINCPAC, COMSEVENTHFLT, CTF 72, CTG 77.5.

south were closing at an approximate speed of 70 knots. (The original message gave the speed as seven knots the time of correction is unknown.)[1] This time, it reported that the attacking PT had launched a torpedo after the MADDOX had opened fire. This PT now was withdrawing and it was intended that the CAP aircraft would attack the hostile PT.[2] This attack was to be carried out by aircraft from the TICONDEROGA as augmented by aircraft from the CONSTELLATION, which by now had moved into the general area when the engagement was occurring.[3]

54. At 1052 EDT, the commander of TG 72.1 reported that the MADDOX was now under continuous torpedo attack.[4]

55. At 1115 EDT, CTG 72.1 reported that he thus far had successfully avoided at least six torpedoes and that the hostile PTs were continuing their attack. CTG 72.1 believed the TURNER JOY had sunk one hostile vessel but at least two remained. At that time, the DESOTO Patrol had no air cover; inbound ADs were expected to arrive in 15 minutes and inbound F-4s in 50 minutes. CTG 72.1 was illuminating for the aircraft since it was at that time still night in the Tonkin Gulf.[5]

56. At 1120 EDT, CTF 77 reported that two A-1Hs were airborne at 1007 EDT to replace the air CAP over the DESOTO Patrol.[6] (This message was readdressed to CINCPAC and the JCS over an hour later by CINCPACFLT.)[7]

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[1] Message CTG 77.5 to CTF 72, DTG 041448Z, SECRET. Info: JCS, *et al*.

[2] Message CTF 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT and CTF 72, DTG 041450Z, SECRET.

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] Message CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041452Z, FLASH, UNCLASSIFIED. Info: JCS, CNO, CINCPAC, COMSEVENTHFLT, CTF 72, CTG 77.5

[5] Message CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041515Z, UNCLASSIFIED. Info: JCS, CNO, CINCPAC, COMSEVENTHFLT, CTF 72, CTG 77.5.

[6] Message CTF 77 to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041520Z, SECRET. Readdressed by CINCPACFLT to JCS, CNO and CINCPAC at 041624Z.

[7] *Ibid*.

57. At 1142 EDT, CTG 72.1 reported that the MADDOX alone had evaded about ten torpedoes. Two PTs had been sunk and there were no casualties to the DESOTO Patrol yet. However, lack of illumination was a problem. Air CAP again was on the scene.[1]

UNCLASS

[58. By 1150 EDT, the revised rules of engagement received earlier from the JCS were formally transmitted to CINCPACFLT. Presumably, they had been conveyed previously by verbal means. CINCPAC instructed CINCPACFLT to take steps to destroy all the DRV PT and PGM boats in the general area of the attack on the DESOTO Patrol in the Tonkin Gulf. Aircraft were authorized to pursue hostile forces to a three-mile limit off the North Vietnamese coast. U.S. vessels were to pursue no closer than 11 miles to the North Vietnamese coastline.[2] Shortly thereafter, CINCPAC also directed COMUSMACV to discontinue his special operations under his OPLAN 34-A and to recall all South Vietnamese PTFs to Danang as soon as possible.[3]]

SECRET

[redacted]

59. At 1244 EDT, CINCPACFLT again reiterated to COMSEVENTHFLT that it was imperative that all North Vietnamese craft participating in the action against the DESOTO Patrol by destroyed. He added that upon completion of the current action the DESOTO Patrol was to be immediately resumed. He directed COMSEVENTHFLT to launch armed reconnaissance at the earliest possible time.[4]

60. At 1253 EDT, CINCPACFLT directed COMSEVENTHFLT to set DEFCON 3 due to the attacks on the DESOTO Patrol.[5] About the same time, CINCPAC recommended to the JCS that punitive U.S. air strikes be authorized as soon as possible in reprisal for attacks on the DESOTO Patrol.[6]

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[1] Message CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT; JCS; CNO; CINCPAC; COMSEVENTHFLT; CTF 72; CTG 77.5; DTG 041541Z; UNCLASSIFIED.

[2] Message CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041550Z, SECRET.

[3] Message CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, DTG 041607Z, TOP SECRET.

[4] Message CINCPACFLT to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 041644Z, TOP SECRET.

[5] Message CINCPAC, DTG 041814Z, SECRET. Info: JCS; all CINCs; CINCUSARPAC; PACAF; COMUSMACV, et al.

[6] Message CINCPAC to JCS, DTG 041557Z, SECRET.

61. At 1327 EDT, CTG 72.1 reported that the number of torpedoes fired at the DESOTO Patrol sighted earlier may have been excessive. He noted that a possibility existed that over-eager sonarmen might have misjudged the numbers.[1]

62. Shortly after CTG 72.1 had expressed doubts that the number of torpedoes reported fired at the DESOTO Patrol was accurate and presumably before his message had been received by his superiors in the chain of command, CTG 77.5 reported that 21 torpedoes had been fired at the DESOTO Patrol, but no hits had occurred. According to CTG 77.5, three hostile PTs had been sunk and the weather in the area of the incident was deteriorating.[2]

63. At 1447 EDT, CTG 72.1 reported that he was certain that the original ambush was bonafide. He added that the details of the action which followed presented a confusing picture. He reported that he had interviewed witnesses who had made positive visual sightings of cockpit lights or similar objects passing near the MADDOX. Several wakes reported as torpedoes were probably the hostile boats themselves, which were observed to make several close passes on the MADDOX. In addition, the U.S. ships' screw noises may have accounted for some reports of torpedoes. CTG 72.1 added that he was unable to estimate the total number of enemy boats involved, but that the TURNER JOY reported that two torpedoes had passed near her.[3]

64. At 1528 EDT, CTG 77.5 reported that returning pilots landing on the TICONDEROGA reported no visual sighting of any hostile PT vessels.[4]

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[1] Message CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT, DTG 041727Z, UNCLASSIFIED.

[2] Message CTG 77.5 to COMSEVENTHFLT, DTG 041732Z, SECRET.

[3] Message CTG 72.1 to AIG 181, DTG 041848Z, SECRET NOFORN. Info: CTG 77.5; CTG 77.6; COMUSMACV, et al.

[4] Message CTG 77.5 to CTF 72, DTG 041928Z, SECRET.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

65. After the first attack on the DESOTO Patrol on 2 August, the highest echelons of the National Command Authority had directed that the patrols in the Tonkin Gulf be resumed as soon as possible. To fulfill this requirement, it had been necessary to begin the new patrol with the destroyers MADDOX and TURNER JOY, the only two available in the WESTPAC area which carried the special communications equipment deemed essential for ships carrying out the patrol. Since it was not possible to perform needed repairs at sea, the MADDOX, in particular, had resumed the patrol with certain communications deficiencies. Consequently as the second -- 4 August -- attack evolved, difficulties were encountered in obtaining quickly from the operational area the considerable detail about what was happening there required in Washington.

[redacted]

67. Although the rules of engagement which were to govern the incident were clarified by the JCS only after the shooting had started, the geographical location of the U.S. vessels involved was such that no necessity to engage in hot pursuit of the attacking forces by U.S. aircraft up to a three-mile limit of the

North Vietnamese coastline arose. Nor did any reinforcement of the hostile PT force with enemy jet aircraft from Hainan materialize. Since events evolved as they did, no operational problems arose which could be traced to the limitations of the U.S. freedom of action imposed by the rules of engagement.

APPENDIX D

RECORD MESSAGE TRAFFIC DURING THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT, 4-5 AUGUST 1964

~~TOP SECRET~~

APPENDIX D

RECORD MESSAGE TRAFFIC DURING THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT, 4-5 AUGUST 1964

1. The purpose of this appendix is to provide more detailed data concerning telegraphic messages involved in the communications support of the NMCC, described generally in the preceding main paper. The teletype message traffic of record concerning the DESOTO Patrol action of 4 August 1964 and the PIERCE ARROW operation of 4 to 6 August 1964 has been analyzed from the point of view of receipt by the Joint Staff. Messages comprising the Navy Communication Station "Tonkin Gulf File" and the J-3 Pacific Division list of "Significant Messages Related to Operation PIERCE ARROW" have been studied.

2. For each of the messages, the following data have been obtained:

(1) Time of origin - message DTG
(2) Originator - sending office
(3) Primary addressee
(4) Method of addressing to JCS - direct addressee, info copy, readdressal
(5) Message precedence to JCS
(6) Message nature (or purpose)
(7) Circuit used for transmission to Navy Communications Center (NAVCOMMCTR), Pentagon
(8) Time of receipt in NAVCOMMCTR, Pentagon
(9) Time first tube copy logged in JCS Message Center from Army Communications Center, Pentagon
(10) Time reproduced copy logged in JCS Message Center (for distribution)
(11) Army crypto channel number to JCS
(12) Time logged in Army Crypto Center (for select samples only)

3. From the data pertinent to each message the following additional data have been developed:

a. Transmittal time from origin to Navy Communications Center, Pentagon. Hours and minutes from message DTG to time of receipt (TOR) stamp NAVCOMMCTR.

b. Transmittal time from origin to JCS Message Center (JCSMSGCTR), Pentagon. Hours and minutes from message DTG to TOR stamp, JCSMSGCTR. Since advance copies are sent from Army Crypto Center to the NMCC at the same time

~~TOP SECRET~~

as to the JCS Message Center, these times approximate time of receipt at the NMCC.

c. Hard copy reproduction time. Hours and minutes from TOR, JCS Message Center to reproduced copy logged JCSMSGCTR.

d. The difference in transmittal time on Navy circuits as compared with transmittal time on Army Circuits -- TOR NAVCOMMCTR compared with TOR JCSMSGCTR.

4. In addition, the following calculations were made for part of the messages, as indicated:

a. For all messages received by the JCS as readdressals, the time from origin to readdressal and time from readdressal to receipt JCS Message Center.

b. For three samples taken from midday 4 August, early 5 August and midday 5 August, each sample of ten messages, time for transmission from Army Crypto Center, Pentagon, to the JCS Message Center.

[redacted]

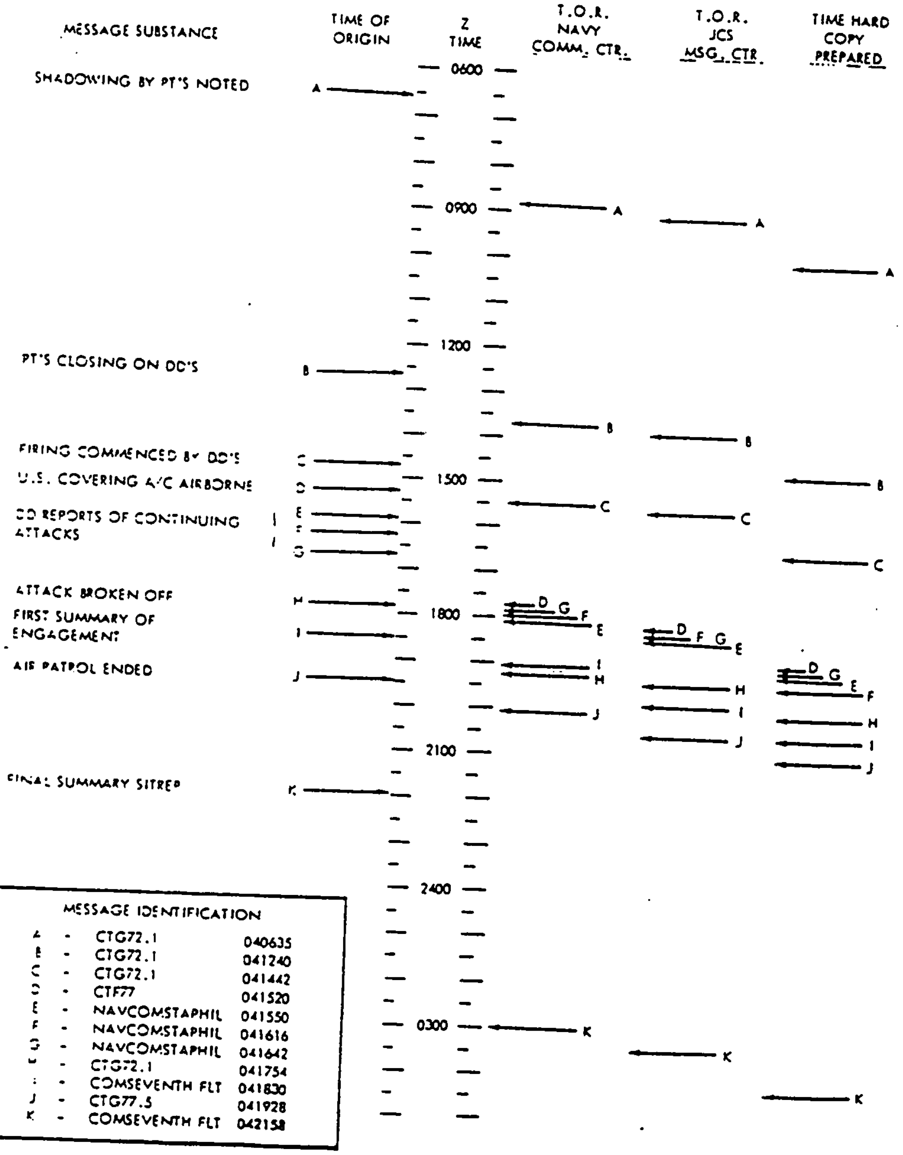
c. For 23 messages advance copies of which are still in NMCC files, the differences in TOR NMCC and TOR JCSMSGCTR.

DESOTO PATROL COMMUNICATIONS

5. The DESOTO Patrol incident of 4 August was reported to Washington by teletype through 45 messages. These were sent between 0635Z (0235 EDT), when the MADDOX first reported shadowing by PT boats, and 2158Z (1758 EDT), when COMSEVENTHFLT sent in his "final" summary SITREP of the incident. These messages were received in the Pentagon between 0505 EDT on 4 August and 1627 EDT on 5 August. Figure 1 indicates times required for message transmittal and copy reproduction for key incidents during the 4 August DESOTO Patrol action.

6. Thirty-eight of the 45 messages were addressed to the JCS for either action or information. The other seven were addressed to CNO and were passed on to the JCS as of JCS

~~SECRET~~



MESSAGE IDENTIFICATION

A	-	CTG72.1	040635
B	-	CTG72.1	041240
C	-	CTG72.1	041442
D	-	CTF77	041520
E	-	NAVCOMSTAPHIL	041550
F	-	NAVCOMSTAPHIL	041616
G	-	NAVCOMSTAPHIL	041642
H	-	CTG72.1	041754
I	-	COMSEVENTH FLT	041830
J	-	CTG77.5	041928
K	-	COMSEVENTH FLT	042158

DE SOTO Patrol Action 4 August 1964

10-9-64-1

~~SECRET~~

DRAFT 2

FIGURE 1
APPENDIX D

interest after screening in the NAVCOMMCTR. Only seven messages were directly addressed to JCS. The JCS was an initial information addressee on 20 messages. Eleven messages were readdressed to the JCS by initial addressees after receipt and screening. The median time for readdressal to the JCS was 48 minutes (i.e., half the messages were readdressed in less than 48 minutes and half took longer than 48 minutes). The JCS was made an info addressee on one-fourth of the readdressals within 35 minutes of message DTG's and the slowest quarter took at least one hour nine minutes.

7. Twenty-six of the 45 messages concerned specific interaction of the DD, USS MADDOX, designated Task Group (TG) 72.1, and the North Vietnam patrol and torpedo boats. However, only nine of these 26 messages were received from TG 72.1. Nine others of the 26 were picked up from 72.1 and sent over again by the USS TICONDEROGA. Six messages were similarly sent by NAVCOMMSTAPHIL at San Miguel after pick-up from 72.1, and two were sent in the same way from USS CONSTELLATION.

8. All but one of the messages sent by the MADDOX were of FLASH precedence. Similarly, 8 of the 9 retransmittals of MADDOX messages from the TICONDEROGA were of FLASH precedence. All of the retransmittals of info from the MADDOX passed on by NAVCOMMSTAPHIL and by the CONSTELLATION were of IMMEDIATE precedence. The median times for transmittal to the JCS were 57 minutes for messages sent by CTG 72.1, 58 minutes from the TICONDEROGA, one hour fifty minutes from NAVCOMMSTAPHIL and two hours forty minutes from the CONSTELLATION.

9. It is not known here how many messages were sent by CINCPACFLT concerning the DESOTO Patrol, but JCS was not addressed on any of them. Five of the key messages concerning

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DESOTO Patrol operations were sent by CINCPACFLT, all giving orders to COMSEVENTHFLT or CTG 77, but none were addressed to JCS even as info copies. Four were eventually passed on to NMCC personnel by NAVCOMMCTR, Pentagon and one was re-addressed to JCS by COMSEVENTHFLT. The median time for transmission of these messages to NAVCOMMCTR was 2 hours 27 minutes. The only other messages included in key message files but not sent to the JCS were originated by COMSEVENTHFLT. All were SITREP-type reports to CINCPACFLT. Copies to CNO were used to inform the NMCC.

10. The way messages were transmitted to the NMCC is examined in Table I from the point of view of number of messages and times for transmission, as a function of precedence assigned for transmission to the NMCC. Sample sizes are not large enough to draw detailed conclusions from the data in Table I. However, it is apparent that FLASH messages sent from the west Pacific were taking about an hour to reach the NMCC, and that half of all messages were received an hour and a half after origin. IMMEDIATE precedence messages took about an additional hour and a half in transmission over FLASH. Apparently nothing was gained timewise by addressing messages directly to the JCS rather than sending them as info copies. It is not known how much time was taken in bringing messages addressed to CNO (but not to JCS) to the attention of NMCC personnel.

[redacted]

11. A few additional facts about the 23 FLASH messages may be of interest. Although the median time for transmission to the NMCC was 57 minutes, one quarter of these messages were received within 43 minutes while one quarter took one hour 21 minutes or longer. The fastest took 20 minutes; the slowest five hours 25 minutes. These times were all considerably

TABLE I. 4 August DE SOTO Patrol Action
Number of Messages and Transmission Times to NMCC

Type Addressing	Total	Message Precedence			
		Flash	Immediate	Priority	Routine
JCS Action (or Direct) Addressee					
No. Messages	7	6	1		
Median Transmission Times (Hours:Minutes)	1:29	1:18	2:30		
JCS Info Addressee					
No. Messages	20	15	4	1	
Median Transmission Times	:57	:50	1:28	3:20	
JCS Readdressal Addressee					
No. Messages	11	1	10		
Median Transmission Times	2:34	:57	2:37		
CNO Addressee/NMCC Referral					
No. Messages	7	1	5		1
Median Transmission Times	2:32	2:42	2:27		23:47
Summary - All Types					
No. Messages	45	23	20	1	1
Median Transmission Times	1:29	:57	2:31		

lessened in receipt at the NAVCOMMCTR in the Pentagon as compared with the Army Crypto Center in the Pentagon which passed them on to the NMCC. The median difference for FLASH messages was nine minutes faster to NAVCOMMCTR. One quarter of the FLASH messages were received at least 15 minutes sooner, while the slowest quarter were received six minutes sooner at NAVCOMMCTR. The fastest was received 60 minutes sooner; the slowest 5 minutes later (the only one of the 23 FLASH messages received later in NAVCOMMCTR than in Army Crypto Center).

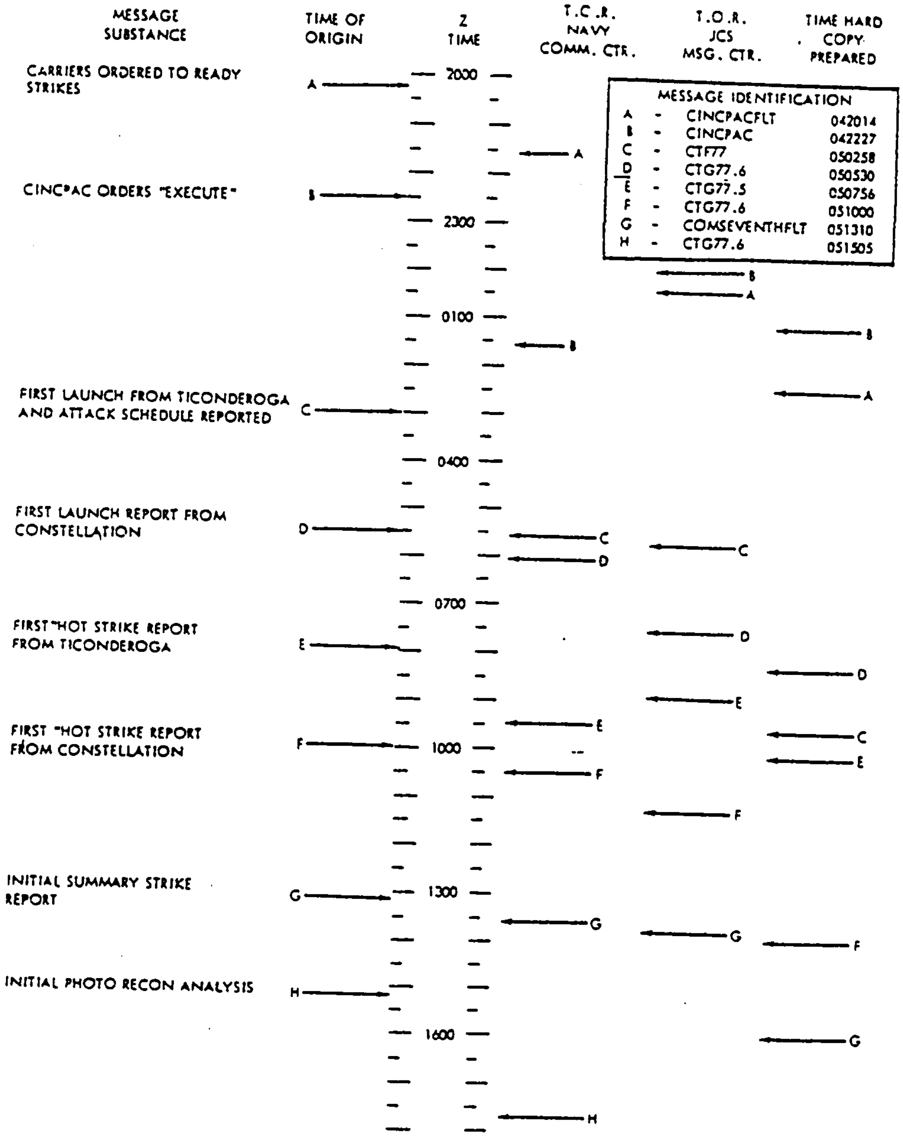
PIERCE ARROW OPERATIONS

12. Incoming messages concerning PIERCE ARROW operations served to inform the Joint Staff of orders passed to the carriers from which strikes were to be launched, the status of planned operations, and the results of the strikes. Those teletypes on file consist of 67 messages sent from the Pacific between 1657Z (1257 EDT) on 4 August (when CINCPAC requested authority from the JCS for reprisal attack) and 0320Z on 6 August (2320 EDT 5 August) (when the Commander of Task Group 77.5 sent in his final "Interim Photo Intelligence Report" on strike results). These messages were received in the Pentagon between 1327 EDT on 4 August and 0215 EDT, 6 August 1964. Figure 2 illustrates the relative timing of information flow concerning some of the key PIERCE ARROW incidents.

13. More than two-thirds of these messages were special situation reports concerning the aircraft strikes. These consisted of SITREPs sent at half-hour intervals from the CONSTELLATION and TICONDEROGA; strike launch, recovery, and photo interpretation reports from the TICONDEROGA; and four summary SITREPs from CINCPACFLT. Aircraft launch and recovery

[redacted]

[redacted]



MESSAGE IDENTIFICATION

A	-	CINCPACFLT	042014
B	-	CINCPAC	042227
C	-	CTF77	050258
D	-	CTG77.6	050530
E	-	CTG77.5	050756
F	-	CTG77.6	051000
G	-	COMSEVENTHFLT	051310
H	-	CTG77.6	051505

PIERCE ARROW Message Transmission 4-5 August 1964

[redacted]

reports from CTG 77.6 aboard the CONSTELLATION were summarized in CTG 77.6's sixteen SITREPs. CTG 77.5 aboard the TICONDEROGA sent the same number of SITREPs and an equal number of other standard format operational messages reporting PIERCE ARROW operations.

14. The time required for transmission of these special situation reports to the NMCC is examined in Table II. The Commander of Task Force 77 (CTF 77) was physically aboard the USS TICONDEROGA (Task Group 77.5) during the PIERCE ARROW operation. All messages sent from the USS CONSTELLATION (Task Group 77.6) were sent to the TICONDEROGA for CTG 77 approval and were then relayed to normal shore communication points. This resulted in the 19-minute difference between the TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION in median times for transmission of FLASH messages. The time loss resulting from the low-precedence transmittal of information from CINCPACFLT is not only directly apparent in the time for his SITREPs, but also is involved in maximum values for both CTG 77.6 SITREPs and CTG 77.5 launch reports where PACFLT retransmittal was effected.

15. Of those messages on file in NAVCOMMCTR and PAC Desk Logs all SITREPs filed after 0530 on 5 August were sent FLASH precedence from the carriers. The first SITREP sent from the CONSTELLATION was not initially addressed to the JCS, but was readdressed by CINCPAC IMMEDIATE to include JCS. The first three SITREPs from the TICONDEROGA were not in message files examined to date, so they may not have been addressed to the JCS. The first strike launch reports from CTG 77.5 were sent IMMEDIATE to JCS for info; the next three were not initially addressed to JCS and were readdressed by

[redacted]

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TABLE II. Special PIERCE ARROW Situation Reports

SOURCE AND TYPE MESSAGE	TRANSMISSION TIME TO NMCC (Hours: Minutes) Median	Fastest 25%	Slowest 25%	Range
CTG 77.5 (TICONDEROGA) SITREPs	0:47	0:28	1:12	0:22-1:37
CTG 77.6 (CONSTELLATION) SITREPs	1:06	0:39	1:50	0:25-5:27
CINCPACFLT SITREPs	6:47	3:54	8:24	3:54-8:24
CTG 77.5 Aircraft Launch Reports	3:26	2:46	4:20	1:09-4:35
CTG 77.5 Strike, Recovery & Photo Interpretation Reports	1:18	1:03	2:05	0:37-3:29

CINCPAC, and the last four (on file) were sent IMMEDIATE. Three of the aircraft recovery and initial strike result reports were sent FLASH, three others IMMEDIATE. Two interim photo interpretation reports were sent IMMEDIATE. All included JCS as either action or info addressees. Of the three CINCPACFLT SITREPs on file, two were sent to JCS PRIORITY and one IMMEDIATE.

16. The method by which messages concerning PIERCE ARROW operations were addressed to the JCS is examined in Table III. The overall pattern is similar to that for the DESOTO Patrol in Table I preceding. A larger part of the PIERCE ARROW traffic was directly addressed to the JCS, but as before, nothing seems to be gained timewise by making JCS an action rather than an info addressee. For those messages readdressed to include JCS, median time to readdressal was 73 minutes. This was 25 minutes slower than for the DESOTO Patrol readdressals.

17. There were a few PIERCE ARROW messages of interest because of extremes represented. For example, as was also indicated in the DESOTO Patrol traffic, it can take almost five and a half hours for a FLASH SITREP to reach the NMCC from WESTPAC. Or for another example, eight days after a message is received at CINCPAC it can be decided that the message is of CNO interest and be readdressed so that on receipt in Washington it is still considered to be of enough interest to JCS to refer it to the NMCC. The importance of the readdressals and CNO referrals to the JCS points up the fact that addressing in the field cannot be counted on to keep the JCS informed without very specific orders to do so. (And it must be kept in mind that such orders will normally cause subordinates to be placed in the embarrassing position of apparently bypassing their superiors, so that resistance at both echelons may be expected.)

[redacted]

[redacted]

TABLE III. 4-6 August PIERCE ARROW Messages From CINCPAC Area Number of Messages and Transmission Times to NMCC

Type Addressing	Total	Message Precedence			
		Flash	Immediate	Priority	Routine
JCS Action (or Direct) Addressee					
No. Messages	27	20	4	3	
Median Transmission Time (Hours:Minutes)	1:15	1:03	2:49	3:54	
JCS Info Addressee					
No. Messages	26	12	11	2	1
Median Transmission Time	1:18	:36	2:47	9:39	6:10
JCS Readdressal Addressee					
No. Messages	6		6		
Median Transmission Time	3:07		3:07		
CNO Addressee/NMCC Referral					
No. Messages	8		5	3	
Median Transmission Time	4:54		2:38	13:12	
Summary - All Types					
No. Messages	67	32	26	8	1
Median Transmission Times	1:33	:47	2:50	7:15	6:10

[redacted]

[redacted]

18. Transmission times to the JCS for PIERCE ARROW messages are examined as a function of message source in Table IV below.

TABLE IV. PIERCE ARROW Message Traffic by Source.

Originating Office	No. of Messages	Median Transmission Time Hours:Minutes
CINCPAC	5	3:10
CINCPACFLT	5	6:47
COMSEVENTHFLT	2	:42[a]
CTG 77	2	5:33
CTG 77.5	30	1:10
CTG 77.6	19	1:19
4 Miscellaneous Offices	4	3:35
TOTAL	67	1:33

[a] Time of transmission to CNO -- referral time to JCS unknown.

19. It is apparent from Table IV that it was possible to get the word to the NMCC from the CVA's -- in the Tonkin Gulf (CTGs. 77.5 and 77.6) in an average time of about an hour and a quarter. In view of the many-hour delay in getting the key information concerning actual attack schedules to the NMCC (described elsewhere in this paper) it is apparent that the problem lay in what was being said rather than in the communications capability to say it.

20. It is apparent from examination of the message transmission times as a function of precedence that key data could have been transmitted in better than "average" times (for the whole PIERCE ARROW Operation) by assigning high precedence to messages. A review of the individual messages clearly indicates that the human element involved in message transmission does more often than not give preferential treatment to really

important information. This is reflected in samples of "more significant" messages almost always taking less than average time for transmission within the precedence assigned. The distribution of message transmission times as a function of precedence is shown in Table V.

TABLE V. PIERCE ARROW Message Transmission Times to NMCC

	Message Precedence		
	FLASH	IMMEDIATE	PRIORITY
Median	0:47	2:47	8:18
Fastest 25% less than	0:35	1:25	3:54
Slowest 25% more than	1:15	3:23	9:24
Range Fastest	0:22	1:05	3:10
Slowest	5:27	6:47	10:59

NOTE: Readdressals and referrals from CNO omitted here.

21. It was true for the PIERCE ARROW messages as it was for the DESOTO Patrol traffic, that messages were handled faster on the numerous alternate routes to CNO from WESTPAC than on the relatively fixed Army circuits serving JCS. The median FLASH message was received 12 minutes sooner in the Navy Communications Center than in the NMCC. Three quarters of the FLASH messages were received nine minutes sooner or more in NAVCOMMCTR and one quarter were received 36 minutes sooner or more. For messages of IMMEDIATE precedence, the median was exactly one hour less time to NAVCOMMCTR, with three quarters received at least 31 minutes sooner and one quarter received at least one hour 26 minutes sooner. Of the 52 PIERCE ARROW messages addressed to both CNO and JCS only 5 were received earlier by JCS. In the extreme cases, one FLASH message was received one hour 27 minutes earlier in NAVCOMMCTR, one IMMEDIATE

message 5 hours 55 minutes sooner, and one PRIORITY message 8 hours 9 minutes sooner.

22. Although advance copies of teletype messages served to inform key NMCC personnel of DESOTO Patrol and PIERCE ARROW operations, the bulk of the Joint Staff were dependent on reproduced copy to keep informed and to serve as the basis for necessary staff support. The time required to reproduce messages in "hard copy" from the time advance copy was received at the JCS message center is indicated below in Table VI.

TABLE VI. DESOTO Patrol and PIERCE ARROW
Message Reproduction Times

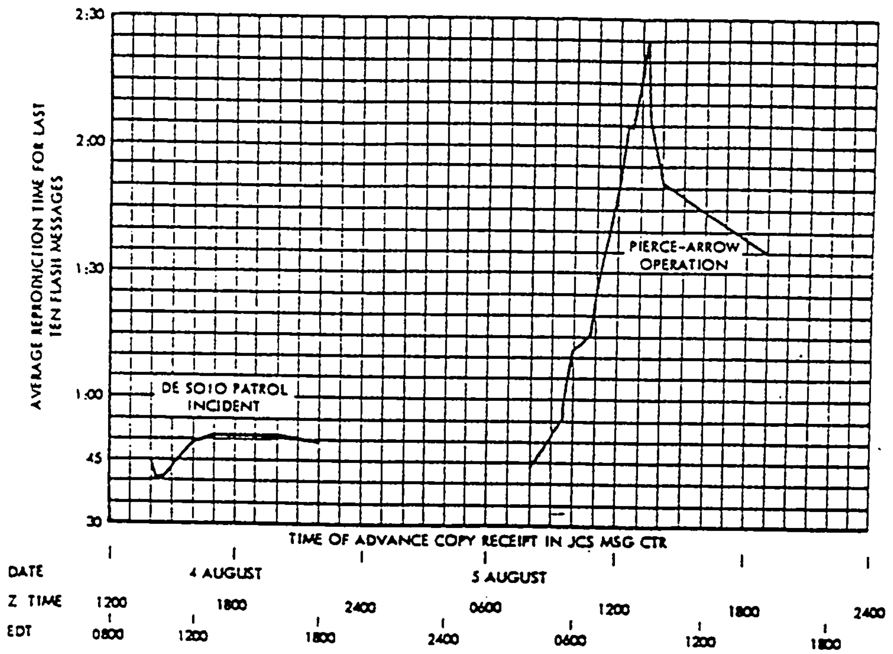
	Message Precedence		
	FLASH	IMMEDIATE	PRIORITY
Median	0:58	1:08	1:55
Fastest 25% less than	0:41	0:46	1:50
Slowest 25% more than	1:41	2:27	10:30
Range Fastest	0:17	0:26	1:47
Slowest	3:19	5:37	10:50

23. The length of time required for message reproduction is, of course, a function of message length as well as precedence. FLASH messages tend to be much shorter than IMMEDIATE, which are in turn shorter than PRIORITY. This is partly responsible for time differentials in Table VI, as it is the policy to stop work on long lower precedence messages to get higher precedence ones out. However the major reason for reproduction time delays is the backlog of same or higher precedence messages when an advance copy is received. This is sporadic. It had little or no effect on reproduction of messages concerning the DESOTO Patrol incident, but resulted in some considerable delays in reproduction of PIERCE ARROW operation messages.

24. This effect of message backlog is illustrated in Figure 3 for the FLASH precedence messages. Data have not yet been obtained to indicate the total number of messages awaiting reproduction at any one time, but the effect is readily apparent. It may be concluded that with current reproduction capabilities, several hours delay in standard distribution through the Joint Staff of most important messages may be expected during "hot" reporting periods.

25. As a check on overall delays in message transmission, the transmission time from the Army Crypto Center to the JCS Message Center was examined. Three samples of ten messages each taken at the start, middle and end of the DESOTO/PIERCE ARROW operation, all show between one and two minutes median transmission times. The slowest 25 percent of these messages took three to five minutes; the fastest 50 percent took one minute enroute.

26. There were some opinions expressed in interviews that the NMCC had gotten some advance copy by pony circuit from the AJCC (Fort Ritchie) faster than from the Army Crypto Center--JCS Message Center routing. Twenty-three advance copies of incoming messages were in NMCC files, and the difference in the time-of-receipt (TOR) NMCC stamp and TOR JCS Message Center were calculated. Unfortunately, there was no way to tell from the 23 advance copies on file how they had been relayed to the NMCC. Further, there is evidence that the NMCC TOR stamp was not affixed until advance copy had been in the NMCC for some time--at least long enough to be read, perhaps by several people. This evidence is found in telephone discussion of messages by NMCC personnel prior to logged-in time on advance copy. In any case, the data from these TOR stamps



FLASH Message Reproduction Times in JCS MSG CTR

FIGURE 3
APPENDIX D

show no case where a message was logged in the NMCC prior to logging in JCSMSGCTR. The median difference was five minutes later in the NMCC. One-quarter of these advance copies were logged 11 to 16 minutes later in NMCC than in the JCSMSGCTR.

APPENDIX E

OUTLINE CHRONOLOGY OF WASHINGTON ACTIONS

(Eastern Daylight (Q) Time)

PAGES 146 - 154

APPENDIX F

KEY MESSAGES, GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT, 4-5 AUGUST 1964

APPENDIX F

KEY MESSAGES, GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT, 4-5 AUGUST 1964

1. This Appendix lists key messages relating to the Gulf of Tonkin incident. In the conduct of this study, WSEG was unable to locate a complete list of pertinent messages, and some importan messages have not been sighted. From an examination of the Tonkin message files which were kept at various locations in J-3 and elsewhere, it is apparent that not all of the messages concerning the event were received or retained in J-3.

2. For convenience of reference, the messages are listed in three groups: those pertaining to the 4 August attack on the DESOTO Patrol, those pertaining to Operation PIERCE ARROW, and those pertaining to OPLAN 37-64 deployment.

4 AUGUST ATTACK ON DESOTO PATROL

CTG 72.1 041240Z. DESOTO Patrol has received information indicating an attack by PGN-4's is imminent. Two DD's in the Patrol proceeding southwest at best speed.

CTG 77.5 041336Z. CTG 72.1 reports sighting two unidentified vessels (SKUNKs) and three unidentified aircraft (BOGIEs) in the DESOTO Patrol area. CTG 77.5 aboard the TICONDEROGA has launched 2 F-8's and 2 F-8's and 2 A-4 D's to establish CAP over the DESOTO Patrol DD's.

CTG 77.5 041408Z. CTG 72.1 reports BOGIEs have disappeared from radar screen, SKUNKs maintaining distance of about 27 miles. TG 77.5 aircraft continue to maintain CAP over DESOTO Patrol.

JCS 7700, 041433Z. Directs CINCPAC to move TG 77.6 (USS CONSELLATION) to area of South Vietnam; establishes rules of engagement for DESOTO Patrol.

CTG 77.5 041434Z. New SKUNKs, contacting at 13 miles, have closed to 11 miles of DESOTO Patrol and are evaluated as hostile. The two original SKUNKs are now 40 miles away. TG 77.5 aircraft continue to maintain CAP over DESOTO Patrol.

CTG 72.1 041442Z. MADDOX has commenced firing on a closing hostil PT boat.

CTG 77.5 041448Z. DESOTO Patrol reports two hostile PT's on beam of MADDOX closing to 10 miles; the two PT's 40 miles south are closing at approximate speed of 70 knots.

CTG 77.5 041450Z. Attacking PT launched a torpedo after MADDOX opened fire. This PT now withdrawing. CAP aircraft will attack PT.

CTG 72.1 041452Z. MADDOX now under continuous torpedo attack.

CTG 72.1 041515Z. DESOTO Patrol thus far has successfully avoided at least 6 torpedoes. Hostile PTs are continuing their attack. TURNER JOY believed to have sunk one; at least two remain. DESOTO Patrol has no air cover now; inbound AD's expected to arrive in 15 minutes and inbound F-4's in 50 minutes. CTG 72.1 illuminating for the aircraft.

CTG 72.1 041542Z. MADDOX alone has evaded about 10 torpedoes; 2 TPs sunk; no casualties to DESOTO Patrol yet; lack of illumination a problem.

CINCPAC 041550Z. Take steps to destroy all DRV PT boats and SWATOWs in general area of attack on DESOTO Patrol. Aircraft authorized to pursue to 3-mile limit; ships to 11-mile limit.

COMNAVSTAPHIL 041616Z. CTG 72.1 reports he thinks one hostile PT sunk another hostile PT.

CTG 72.1 041618Z. DESOTO Patrol under attack again.

CINCPACFLT 041644Z. Imperative all North Vietnamese craft participating in tonight's action against DESOTO Patrol be destroyed. Upon completion current action, DESOTO Patrol to be immediately resumed. Launch armed recce at earliest possible time.

CTG 72.1 041727Z. Number of torpedoes fired at DESOTO Patrol cited earlier may have been excessive; possible sonarmen misjudged.

CTG 77.5 041732Z. Twenty-one torpedoes have been fired at DESOTO Patrol, but no hits yet. Three hostile PTs have been sunk. Weather in the area deteriorating.

CTG 72.1 041754Z. MADDOX and TURNER JOY now are in the clear; attacks have ceased.

CINCPAC 041814Z. Reports that CINCPACFLT has directed COMSEVENTHFLT to set DEFCON 3 at 041653Z due to attacks on DESOTO Patrol.

COMSEVENTHFLT 041830Z. Plan to resume DESOTO Patrol with armed recce and air cover; seek out and destroy PT's in Gulf of Tonkin.

CTG 72.1 041848Z. CTG 72.1 reports he is certain original ambush bonafide. Details of action following present a confusing picture.

CTG 77.5 041928Z. Returning TICONDEROGA pilots report no visual sighting of any PT vessels.

CTG 72.1 042158Z. Final SITREP re attacks on DESOTO Patrol.

USS TURNER JOY 042310Z. Furnishes information confirming attack on DESOTO Patrol.

CINCPAC 042337Z. SITREP No. 1 reporting attack on DESOTO Patrol by DRV PT boats.

JCS 7728 050027Z. Special SITREP informing all CINCs of attack on DESOTO Patrol and decision to execute Operation PIERCE ARROW in retaliation.

OPERATION PIERCE ARROW

CINCPACFLT 041509Z. Advises CONSEVENTHFLT for planning purposes that strong possibility exists that COMSEVENTHFLT will be directed on short notice to lay on armed recce at sea against SWATOWs or a reprisal attack against certain SWATOW bases such as Quang Ke, Ben Thuy or Phuc Loi.

CINCPAC 041547Z. Directs CINCPACFLT to airlift for possible use in mining 5 SWATOW bases in North Vietnam 100 Mark 50 mines to the CVAs TICONDEROGA or CONSTELLATION as soon as possible.

CINCPAC 041657Z. Recommends to JCS that punitive U.S. air strikes be authorized as soon as possible in reprisal for attacks on DESOTO Patrol.

CINCPACFLT 042014Z. Directs COMSEVENTHFLT to be prepared to strike at 050700G local time. a) SWATOW and PT boats at Quang Khe, Ben Thuy, Hon Ne Island, Song Me estuary, Hon Gay and Port Wallut; b) any identified NVM SWATOW/PT craft located at sea; and c) the Vinh oil storage complex. The Vinh POL installation is the target of Number 1 priority; all targets are to be struck simultaneously. CVA aircraft only to be utilized. Advise of strike plan but do not launch until an execute order is received.

CINCPAC 042035Z. Directs CINCPACFLT to prepare to execute above strikes at 042300Z (which would be 0700H time). Adds that post-strike recce is required and directs CINCPACFLT to provide air defense and sea-air rescue (SAR) for strike forces.

JCS 7720 042119Z, (first transmitted via EMATS teletype at 042049Z). Directs CINCPAC to execute a one-time maximum air strike, using CVA aircraft only, by 0700 local time on 5 August. The strikes are to be made at SWATOW and PT boats at Port Wallut, Hon Gay, Quang Khe, and the Loc Chau estuary near Thanh Hoa; and against the boats and POL facilities in the Vinh/Phuc Loi area. Armed reconnaissance against boats outside the three-mile limit is authorized, but aircraft are to avoid Hainan Island and the Chinese border. If weather precludes meeting the time of attack, CINCPAC is to proceed at the soonest and notify the JCS ASAP. If the targets are not destroyed on the first strike, he is to request authority for a second strike. The JCS is to be advised of the details of the strike plan when available, including the number of sorties against each target complex, weapon loading, tactics, etc. Flash reports are desired on mission results, and photo coverage is desired ASAP.

JCS 7722 042155Z. Unclassified nickname for this operation is PIERCE ARROW.

COMSEVENTHFLT 042222Z. Directs 2nd AD to alert units for possible SAR operations in Gulf of Tonkin; heavy flights will occur approximately 050001Z. Direct liaison with CTG 77.5 authorized.

CINCPAC 042227Z. Informs CINCPACFLT that authority has been granted to execute PIERCE ARROW strikes. Requests launch reports, estimates of strike results, recoveries and confirmed strike results as they occur.

COMSEVENTHFLT 042321Z. Directs CTG 70.4 to sail in the direction of TGs 77.5 and 77.6 in the South China Sea.

CTF 77 042329Z. Directs CTG 77.6 aboard the USS CONSTELLATION to take the following targets for planning action: Port Wallut, Loc Chao Estuary, Hon Gay, and armed recce against SWATOW's and PT boats north of 19-00 N. CTG 77.5 (USS TICONDEROGA) to cover remainder of targets.

CINCPAC 050113Z. Directs CINCPACFLT to expedite handling of recce photos of North Vietnamese targets in accordance with Yankee Team procedures.

CTG 77.6 050128Z. Submits strike plans and estimated launch times for assigned targets.

CINCPACFLT 050403Z. Cancels strike by TG 77.6 on Port Wallut. Directs COMSEVENTHFLT to add these aircraft to the effort against Hon Gay. Imperative that Vinh POL storage be destroyed today. If initial TICONDEROGA strike unsuccessful, reload as soon as possible and stand by. Do not launch restrike until directed.

CTG 77.5 050414Z. [redacted] A-1's, [redacted] A-4's, [redacted] F-8's and [redacted] RF-8 to attack Vinh-Ben Thuy at approximately 0525Z. [redacted] F-8 and [redacted] RF-8 to attack Quang Khe at approximately 0515Z. Armed recce scheduled along coastline from targets after strikes by F-8's.

CTG 77.6 050442Z. Intend to execute strike plan as directed.

CTG 77.6 050530Z. Launched [redacted] A-1 for Hon Gay, [redacted] A-1 for Loc Chao estuary at 050500Z. Also launched [redacted] F-4 for TG CAP, and [redacted] E1B for AEW and commo relay.

CTF 77 050612Z. Strike plan for Vinh POL restrike.

CTG 77.5 050616Z. Returning aircraft from Vinh POL primary target report it burning profusely. Six PT in area; all attacked; at least 4 hit; one dead in the water. Heavy flak; [redacted] F-8 damaged proceeding to Da Nang.

CTG 77.5 050645Z. Returning A-1's report all hits, POL area burning, all aircraft up. Photo pilots returning report mission successful. Restrike scheduled for Vinh POL and coastal armed recce Hon Me and other PT/SWATOW support bases. Launch time 0800Z; TOT 0900Z.

CTG 77.6 050800Z. Unverified reports indicate [redacted] A-4 shot down vicinity of Hon Gay and additional report [redacted] A-1 shot down vicinity Hon Gay with no survivors. Have alerted SAR forces.

CTG 77.6 050830Z. Hon Gay attack commenced on schedule; moderate to heavy accurate AA fire. [redacted] A-4 crashed, bailout observed. One A-1 crashed, pilot splashed in harbor, no survivors. Remainder aircraft now enroute to CONSTELLATION. Flight leader reports 5 PT boats destroyed.

CTG 77.5 050832Z. SITREP on strike on Vinh POL Storage. CINCPAC 050920Z. Points out to JCS necessity for clarification of rules of engagement in light of Tonkin Gulf incident.

CINCPAC 051051Z. SITREP on PIERCE ARROW strike results. DESOTO Patrol being withdrawn for replenishment, will be prepared to resume operations 7 August. Status of forces deployed under OPLAN 37-64.

CINCPAC 051113Z. Directs CINCPACFLT to handle PIERCE ARROW poststrike recce photos by most expeditious means.

COMUSMACV and USEMB SAIGON 051229Z. General Khanh and other South Vietnamese government leaders briefed on Operation PIERCE ARROW. General Khanh repeated several times his position that if South Vietnam is attacked in retaliation he would counter-retaliate without awaiting U.S. approval. In subsequent conversation, U.S. ambassador delivered letter from President stressing need for closest bilateral consultation. General Khanh stated he fully accepted this requirement.

JCS 7735 051254Z. SITREP to all CINCs on PIERCE ARROW strike results.

CTG 77.5 051310Z. Final PIERCE ARROW SITREP. [redacted] attack sorties and 4 photorecce sorties flown. Two strikes flown against Vinh POL target. Ten to 12 oil tanks and AAA gun positions destroyed. In single strike against Quang Khe, 1 PT boat estimated destroyed, 3 damaged. An armed coastal recce flight attacked 3 PTs inflicting light to moderate damage to all. Two additional PTs struck and destroyed as targets of opportunity by armed coastal recce. [redacted] F-8 sustained a single 30-caliber hit. No injuries and no other aircraft hit.

CTG 77.6 051430Z. Final PIERCE ARROW SITREP. Strike results, Hon Gay. After strafing and rocket runs, 1 SWATOW burning, 2 badly damaged. After A-4 attack. 1 SWATOW dead in the water burning and 4 boats underway. A-1s attacked all boats, leaving 1 SWATOW dead in the water burning, 1 PGM burning and slowly circling, 3 PTs strafed and hit with rockets. All attacking aircraft had moderate to intense AA fire and fire from guns on PT/SWATOWs. [redacted] A-4 lost in the attack. Strike results Loc Chao estuary. A-1 saw 5 PTs, took 2 under attack, leaving both dead in the water and smoking. Throughout the attack, AAA from boats. [redacted] A-1 H lost and [redacted] A-1 H damaged but recovered safely. [redacted] A-4s attacked remaining 3 PTs, leaving one hit and afire, one damaged in stern, both DIW and burning on departure.

JCS 051439Z. Imposes minimize world-wide on all originators of teletype, telephone and data messages addressed to WESTPAC area.

JCS 7760 052223Z. Denies PACOM request for permission to carry out armed recce of DRV PT boats except in connection with the one-time effort, Operation PIERCE ARROW. When PIERCE ARROW completed, rules of engagement allowing for self-defense only will apply.

JCS 7762 052257Z. SITREP reporting strike results, Operation PIERCE ARROW. A total of [redacted] sorties were flown; the Vinh POL primary target estimated 90 percent damaged. Thirty PGM/PTs were sighted; 8 destroyed; 6 severely damaged; 10 moderately damaged; 4 lightly damaged.

JCS 052326Z. Nickname PIERCE ARROW applied only to the one-time CVA strike. No nickname assigned to alert and deployment of OPLAN 37-64 forces.

OPLAN 37-64 DEPLOYMENTS

JCS 7729 050043Z. Directs certain actions with respect to alert and deployment of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 Category 3 forces in view of attacks on DESOTO Patrol.

A. Following units are to deploy as soon as possible:

Sail 1 CVA TG from Japan to South China Sea
SLF (Marine) sail vicinity Danang
Embark and sail Marine brigade from Okinawa to South China Sea
Sail 1 CVA TG from First Fleet to WESTPAC
1 Recce TF (6 RF-101's; STRICOM to Kadena

B. Following units are alerted for deployment immediately upon receipt of political clearance; STRICOM units may deploy but remain in U.S. territory until clearance is received:

2 B-57 sqdns from Clark to South Vietnam
1 F-105 sqdn from Yokota to Korat
1 F-100 sqdn from Clark to Takhli
1 FIS sqdn (12 F-102's) from Clark to South Vietnam
8 KC 135's from SAC to Clark
2 F-100 sqdns from STRICOM to Clark
1 F-105 sqdn from STRICOM to Kokota
1 Recce TF (6 RF 101's) from Misawa/Kadena to Southeast Asia.

C. Following units are alerted for possible deployment:

173rd Abn bgde from Okinawa to Southeast Asia
Fwd Floating Depot from Philippines to Thailand
Marine Air Group from Okinawa to Danang
1 U.S. Army bgde from Hawaii to Thailand

CINCPAC's recommendations on any other alerting actions and deployments desired are requested.

CINCSTRIKE 050347Z. Establishes DEFCON 3 for AFSTRIKE forces in OPLAN 32 as of 1600Z.

CINCPAC 050424Z. Directs alert and deployment of selected CINCUSARPAC, PACAF and CINCPACFLT forces for support of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 in accordance with message JCS 7729.

CINCPAC 050445Z. Recommends additional alerting and deployment of OPLAN 37-64 forces over and above those cited in JCS 7729. The alerts and deployments recommended are:

CINCPACFLT:

Alert 1st Marine bgde in Hawaii and position 1 Phibron for movement of that bgde from Hawaii to Okinawa/Cubi

Alert 1 MCS, 5 MSO and 9 MSC for movement from Japan to South China Sea area

Alert 1 VPR on land RV as required in WESTPAC for movement to South China Sea area

Alert 1 ASW support carrier group, 1 cruiser type, 2 SESDIVs 1 MINDIV, 1 VPRON(P-2) and necessary additional service and support forces for possible deployment from the First Fleet to WESTPAC.

CINCUSARPAC:

Alert 2 bgdes of 25th Division instead of one. One to be tailored to Sect II DAFD at Korat; other for DA forward floating depot.

If deployment directed, Hawaii brigades should be the first deployed and 173rd Abn held in PACOM reserve.

Do not retain theater airlift in place as recommended in JCS 7729 for movement of ARPAC forces.

CINCSTRIKE:

Alert 1 TC terminal service company for airlift to Bangkok for off-load FFD

Alert augmentation for deployed forces: 1 Engr Bn Cbt; 2 ASA VIJ Plat (Inf); Hq and Hq Det, Sig Gp; Sig Bn Corps; Radio Relay Co VMF

Alert augmentation of IX Logistics Command to support alerted bgdes

Deploy 2 C-130 sqdns as soon as possible to WESTPAC

Alert 2 additional TFs over and above those directed in JCS 7729

Alert 1 USAF Communications and Control Gp.

COMUSMACV:

Alert 2 air mobile Cos.; 1 Avn Co (Caribou) and 1 Aviation Maintenance Co FBA for deployment from South Vietnam to Korat to support army units which may be deployed to Thailand.

SAC Offutt 050830Z. OPORD for deployment of 12 RF-101 from Shaw to Hickham.

JCS 7732 051201Z. Political clearances for all destination countries have been received for forces listed in Section B of JCS 7729. Deploy these forces only as soon as possible.

JCS-7734 051233Z. Concur in alerting all additional units specified in CINCPAC's 050445Z. Directs CINCSTRIKE to deploy 2 C-130 squadrons to destinations in WESTPAC as specified by CINCPAC and to use his own discretion on retention of airlift in place for list of 173rd abn bgde.

CP AFSTRIKE 051450Z. Directs partial implementation of AFSTRIKE OPLAN 32-P to provide airlift for deployment of fighter and recce units.

CINCUSARPAC 051704. Directs alerts and deployments in support of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 (supporting plan is USARPAC OPLAN 37-64.

JCS 7747 051744Z. Reference JCS 7734, State Department has cleared deployment of one C-130 sqdn to Clark.

CINCSTRIKE 051953Z. OPSUM on STRICOM alerts and deployments in support of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64

CINCPAC 052050Z. SITREP on deployments in support of OPLAN 37-64.

CHJUSMAG THAI 052345Z. Confirms clearance of movement of F-100s from Clark to Takhli and F-105s from Japan to Korat.

RESUMPTION OF DESOTO PATROL

JCS 7761 052220Z. Directs that upon completion of replenishment, DESOTO Patrol be continued with 2 DDs no later than 7 August. Closest approach to the North Vietnamese coast will be 11 nautical miles. In event of hostile attack, aircraft only are authorized to pursue and attack hostile forces up to a 3-n.mi. limit. Ships are authorized to return fire with objective of destroying hostile forces if attacked. CAP at CINCPAC's discretion.

CINCPAC 060042Z. Directs CINCPACFLT to resume patrol in accordance with JCS 7761.

CINCPACFLT 060329Z. Directs COMSEVENTHFLT to resume patrol in accordance with JCS 7761.